ACTION AND VOLITION

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Finally, I declare this to be my own work,

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ABSTRACT

Despite views to the contrary, 'action' is not a concept alien to ordinary ways of thinking, hence the significance of the philosophical problem of action, which demands that we ground this concept in some real difference between actions and other occurrences. I argue that of the two likely candidates, the causal and the volitional theories of action, the causal approach will not suffice because it is unable to cope with instances of wayward causality.

My concern is principally with the volition theory of which the views of James and Prichard are discussed at length. James's account of the will is deemed unacceptable by virtue of its emphasis upon introspection. While Prichard appears to offer good reasons for believing that willing is fundamental to action, his identification of action with volition is rejected. Subsequently, detailed consideration is given to the relation of volition to action, and I suggest that volition be regarded neither as action nor cause of action. Instead, actions are best understood as causings, which embrace both volitions and their effects. This analysis of action is extended through the concept of 'basic action', and it emerges that there is a clear sense in which willing is not intentional.

The suggestion that 'trying' is crucial to the concept of action is discussed and it is argued that willing may constitute trying in every instance of action, although it

never counts as action in its own right.

Volition is faced with with criticisms from Ryle. I defend the view that volitions may be regarded as essentially voluntary, although we may do better to construe it as involuntary. The problem of descriptive deficiency and the logical connection argument are the next challenges met by my account of volition. Several remaining objections to my account of action are dismissed before I demonstrate that, unlike the causal approach, the volition theory meets the rigours of wayward causality.

In conclusion, we have an account of action which harks back to the suggestion of J.S. Mill, that action is 'not one thing but a combination of two'. By thus supposing that volition plays an essential role in action, we can adequately resolve the problem of action with which we began.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 : THE PHILOSOPHER'S 'ACTION'

(1) THE RELEVANCE OF ACTION

There is a vast and ever-growing literature in the field known as 'philosophy of action' or 'action theory', and although understandably perhaps, the philosophical problems associated with action seldom occur to the ordinary man-in-the-street this does not mean that the philosopher's concern is irrelevant, say, to the average housewife. Yet there are those who take the view that the concept of action is itself far removed from ordinary ways of thinking, being a device of the philosopher and not the ordinary man. Austin, in 'A plea for excuses', suggests that

> "The beginning of sense, not to say wisdom, is to realize that 'doing an action', as used in philosophy, is a highly abstract expression ....[and] this use has little to do with the more down-to-earth occurrences of 'action' in ordinary speech." (Austin, 1970:178)

Austin may be correct in his view that the philosopher's talk of action is not to be found verbatim in ordinary speech, but this does not show that the concept of action is alien to everyday thinking. On the contrary, I should wish to suggest that the philosopher's concept of action is matched in the conceptions of the non-philosophical man-in-the-street.

Whereas the philosopher talks of actions, ordinary

speech cites the things that people do. But the class of actions does not match this class of doings, for not all the things that are done qualify as actions. There are many things such as sleeping, sneezing, or dying, that one can do, without thereby acting. So actions, at most, form a subclass of all the things we can be said to do.

Since there is no precise correlation between the familiar notion of what people do and the concept of action, does this indicate a lack of empathy between ordinary ways of thinking and the technical conceptions of the philosopher?

Even if ordinary language does not distinguish actions from non-actions within the class of things people do this does not show a lack of concern for the class of actions. Though not delimited in ordinary speech it is nonetheless true that people adopt different attitudes to those doings which the philosopher would call actions from those which he would not.

Among the things that people can be said to do are many which the person <u>suffers</u> rather than <u>performs</u>. In cases such as sleeping, falling off a cliff, or digesting a meal, the person is passive and although these occurrences, in an important respect, involve the individual, he is not active as he would be in case he was trying to go to sleep, jumping off a cliff, or ingesting a meal. That people respond uniquely to those doings philosophers would call actions can be seen from this contrast between 'active' and 'passive' doings. It is the former class of doings that corresponds to

the class of actions.

An important difference between these two sorts of doing is shown from the fact that approbation is only appropriate in the range of actions. Thus, whenever someone is eligible for praise or blame this is in virtue of some action (active doing) of his. So, if the correlation of actions to active doings is appropriate, we should expect approbation to be inapplicable in instances of passive doing. Yet it appears that people are in fact blamed for sleeping (when they ought to be working) even for falling off a cliff (if they ought to have had more sense). If, as these examples suggest, blame is appropriate in cases of passive doing then the thesis that approbation marks our sensitivity to the class of actions, fails.

In fact, these examples of blame in cases of passive doing are misleading. When we blame the sleeping workman we do so not for his sleeping (passive doing) but for his having gone to sleep (active doing). The fact that he allowed himself to fall asleep on the job is what is reprehensible, not the fact of his sleeping, and we can appreciate this by noting that if there was no way he could have avoided falling asleep (if, for example, he had been drugged) we would not blame him. Furthermore, the possibility of his avoiding falling asleep is just the possibility of his doing something (in the active sense) that would avoid his sleeping on the job. Thus, he might have concentrated on getting on with his work.

Similar considerations apply to the man who falls

from the cliff. He cannot be blamed for this passive doing, but may be blamed for getting into a situation that led to his fall. Getting into that situation, we suppose, involved active doing on his part. If not, then blame is entirely inappropriate.

In his article 'Is 'Human Action' a category?', Arthur Cody poses a seeming objection to this line of thought. Apparently praise and blame are irrelevant in at least some cases of active doing. Thus:

> "..examples such as 'coiling a rope', 'signalling a left turn','walking', 'playing ball', do not usually suggest either praise or blame. So it would appear that not all actions are praise- or blame- worthy..." (Cody, 1971:394)

If there are active doings to which praise and blame do not attach it would seem that approbation cannot serve to distinguish these active doings from passive doings. But this misses the point, for the classification of doings as active or passive does not depend upon the propriety of approbation. Rather, approbation is applicable or otherwise depending upon whether the doing is active or passive. Of course this still leaves unexplained why it is apparently inapplicable in the examples of active doing cited by Cody. When an individual does something actively he is regarded as responsible in a sense in which he is not so regarded if the doing is passive. Praise and blame are applicable only to the former cases, but this does not mean that every active doing will either be praised or blamed. Sometimes we are not sufficiently interested, or the action is not significant

enough to evoke praise or blame. Yet praise and blame potentially extend to any action and not to anything that is not an action. Thus, in relevant circumstances any active doing may receive praise or blame, even 'coiling a rope', 'signalling a left turn', 'walking', and 'playing ball'. In fact, Cody notes that 'the notions of praise- and blame-potentiality are dependent upon what we believe a person can do, and not the other way around' (p.394). Clearly, where a doing is passive, this potential is not present.

So, I have argued that in familiar ways of thinking we contrast the things people do actively with what they do passively. The possibility, not the actual application of praise and blame, marks this distinction, but is not its ground. I thereby submit that people do acknowledge action as conceived of by the philosopher.

Despite what Austin's cited comment may suggest, the abstract notion of 'doing an action' is highly pertinent to ordinary ways of thinking, yet this leaves unchallenged his contention that the philosopher's use of 'action' has little to do with its use in ordinary speech. I shall not leave this unquestioned.

Although I accept Austin's first point that 'doing an action' as used in philosophy is a highly abstract expression, it is misleading to suppose that its use has 'little to do with the more down-to-earth occurrences of 'action' in ordinary speech'.

Some insight may be gained by looking at a dictionary analysis of 'action', as representative of ordinary usage. My dictionary offers the following:

> 'action, n., acting; activity; behaviour; a deed; operation; gesture; fighting; a battle; a lawsuit, or proceedings in a court; mode of moving the legs; the movement of events in a drama, novel, etc.; mechanism, esp. of a keyboard instrument.'

Here we have twelve connotations for 'action'. The first ten are clearly pertinent to the philosopher's notion of action, since they embody the ordinary idea of active doing. The last two are not so obviously relevant. The range of things that make up the events in a drama or a novel exceeds the range of active doings. Obviously, many of the events in the average Shakespeare play are non-actional in the philosopher's sense, but this does not indicate that this connotation of 'action' is less relevant to active doing than the others, for every event involved in such dramatic or literary action is the 'product' of its author. Hence there is a clear sense in which all the 'action' is the author's doing.

The sense of 'action' in the mechanism example is also related to the notion of active doing. Although the mechanism itself, which is called the action, is not an action in the philosopher's sense, it represents a means to action. The mechanism when functioning properly is an instrument for some active doing such as typing a letter, or playing a sonata. I conclude that the evidence weighs against Austin's contention, and that the down-to-earth

occurrences of 'action' in ordinary speech are clearly relevant to the abstract expression of the philosopher. Indeed, the relation between them may be likened to that between the scientific conception of electron flow and the ordinary usage of 'electricity'. Naturally, 'electron flow' as used by scientists is a highly abstract expression, and it may not be exactly what ordinary people have in mind when they talk of electricity, nevertheless, there is a link at the conceptual level between the scientific notion and that of the unscientific man-in-the-street. The latter is faced with everyday manifestations of electron flow, as he is with everyday manifestations of action. It is to be expected then that his understanding of these phenomena, though perhaps imperfect, displays significant features of the more abstract technical conception.

It is clear from what has been shown that some correlate of action plays a vital role in ordinary ways of thinking, for it is actions that are the basis for praise and blame. Furthermore, the common conception of the nature of a person invokes the capacity to act. In philosophical terms, persons are conceived of as agents. In ordinary terms, a person must be able, in principle, to do things (actively and not merely passively).

The commonplace correlate of the concept of action in fact figures prominently in the ordinary conception of what persons are like. We can learn from cases of individuals who become totally paralysed and unable to respond in any way. They are deemed 'human vegetables'.

Although retaining human form they lack the distinctive human capacity to act. There may even be some temptation not to call such individuals 'persons' at all. Certainly they cease to have personality, which is, after all, a function of the individual's behaviour and responses to the world around him. The concept of action is an important aspect of our concept of a person, indeed some would go further and urge that it is a necessary feature of our world view. Hampshire, in "Thought and Action", comments that

> "the most unavoidable feature of our consciousness is the initiation of change at will... the idea of a thinking observer who could form from his experience no notion of making a movement, or, more generally, of doing something is one that may scarcely be entertained." (Hampshire, 1959:69)

I have been at pains to point out the central importance of having a concept of action both for the philosopher and the non-philosopher. We should note that because of its centrality, the position we adopt on the nature of action will ultimately affect our concept of a person. The issue of the nature of action lies with a cluster of philosophical problems which together will determine one's conception of man. (Other related problems are the relation of mind and body, freewill and determinism, and personal identity. The standpoint one adopts on any of these issues affects one's options in each of the others.) Clearly, the concept of action is of crucial significance, for the nature of action prescribes in part the nature of man.

To sum up: I have argued that the concept of action although abstract is not far removed from ordinary ways of thinking. A correlate of this technical notion can be found in the way people commonly acknowledge differences within the range of things that people do. Furthermore, contrary to what Austin suggests, the use of the term 'action' in ordinary speech is clearly relevant to the philosophical concept. Finally, and most importantly, I have noted the significance and centrality of this concept of action in its relation to our overall picture of the nature of man. Thereby, enough has been said to justify taking the philosopher's concern with action seriously. Next, we meet the philosopher's 'problem of action', and consider how it should be approached.

(2) THE PROBLEM OF ACTION

Those people who do not hold a prejudiced view of philosophy, may be surprised to learn that philosophers locate a problem in the area of action. After all, most of us operate happily and successfully with the concept of action, so how does there come to be a problem?

Clearly, the problem does not lie with our ability to distinguish actions from non-actions, but rather with the presumed distinction itself. Our familiar use of the concept invokes this distinction between actions and other events, and the problem is to understand this classification. Richard Taylor tells us that

> "The 'problem of action' ...is essentially that of supplying the difference between mere bodily motions and those that represent acts. There are other problems of action... But at any rate, this is the first that demands our attention." (Taylor, 1966:88-9)

These are concepts with which we all operate, and the problem, we may suppose, is simply to explain what underlies this distinction. Yet there are different ways in which this task can be approached, and this is important because the way that one interprets this problem dictates the sort of theory that can be accepted as a valid account of action. In particular, the task of 'supplying the difference' between actions and other occurrences may or may not be construed as that of locating the basis for this distinction.

Within the various approaches to this problem of action we may discern two categories or types of approach. The first of these covers those responses which seek a solution to the problem through making clear our ordinary usage of 'action' and its related concepts. Often, such approaches are concerned to make explicit what we mean by our talk of actions, or what is entailed when we call something 'action'. Because of this trend, we might call the approaches in this category semantic in nature.

The second category of responses, construe the task of 'supplying the difference' as locating a ground for our distinction between actions and other occurrences. As such, they are concerned less with what we mean by 'action', than with what this term denotes. Because the aim is to seek what underlies or grounds our distinction, we can see this type

of approach as epistemic in nature. Here, the concern is with the epistemological justification of our concept of action; with the basis in fact, for our claim that actions are different from other occurrences.

As an example of the semantic approach, the differences between actions and other events may be detailed by explicating the different attitudes and expressions that apply in each case, as well as the circumstances under which we apply them. Since the concept of action has its roots in ordinary ways of thinking, one may reasonably expect the task to be one of explication. After all, the concept embodies distinctions that we all fundamentally employ, hence the presumption that we only have to articulate the principles of this familiar usage. This conception of the problem is implicit in the views of A.I. Melden who offers a contextual theory of action (Melden, 1956, 196Ø, 1961).

According to this account, the difference between actions and other events is that the former occur in a context that makes it appropriate to treat them differently from the latter. In particular, the required context would fit the action-occurrences within social customs, habits and rules, which in turn, make the aim, goal or purpose of the behaviour comprehensible. Thus, Melden advises us to

> "Consider some of the things we commonly do: we purchase food, drive automobiles, play, work, help and hinder our fellows. In all such activities, we have learned by imitating or following the instructions of others in obeying rules, following criteria, following policies in the practices in which we engage." (Melden, 1956:71; page references to Gustafson, 197Ø.)

He concludes that

> "in the case of the concept of any action the context of practices in which rules are obeyed, criteria employed, policies are observed- a way of thinking and doing- is essential to the understanding of the difference between such bodily movements and actions." (op. cit., p.73)

A similar view of action (and hence a similar approach to the problem of action) is adopted by R.S. Peters:

> "the concept of an action is inseparable from that of intelligence; for part of what we mean by 'intelligence' is the ability to vary movements relative to a goal in a way which is appropriate to changes in the situation relevant to attaining it." (Peters, 1960:13)

Thereby, like Melden, Peters supposes that

> "general standards or rules are implicit in the concept of an action. We can therefore say that a man is doing something efficiently, correctly, and so on, if he knowingly varies what he does in accordance with changes in the situation conventionally singled out as the goal and the conditions perceived as relevant to attaining it. It can only make sense to talk of actions in this way, not of cases where something happens to a man." (op. cit., p.14)

On such an approach, whether an occurrence counts as action depends upon its fitting into a specific type of situation, which means that if we set out to explain the difference between actions and non-actions, all that we can do is explicate the relevant conditions, contexts and conventions that render it appropriate (or not) to treat something as an action. When such details are fully

articulated, they will specify the principles on which we actually apply our distinction between actions and other events. In fact, this would produce a set of rules for the use of 'action-language'.

As this form of solution concentrates on making explicit how and when to apply the concept of action, we may thereby reasonably expect to achieve a clearer understanding of what we mean by 'action'. But it is a consequence of this approach that the basis for this concept and the action-distinction is never in question. After all, it is quite apparent that we mean something by our talk of actions, so the problem is assured of coming up with an answer if it sets out to detail this meaning. This is the essential difference between the semantic and the epistemic conception of the problem of action. Thus, on a theory such as Melden's, to ask whether there is really a difference between actions and other occurrences would indicate one's failure to appreciate the conventions and conditions (the 'common form of life') that makes talk of actions appropriate (Melden, op. cit., p.74).

A second variety of semantic approach to the problem of action is provided by Richard Taylor. Although in many respects similar to the previous conception of the problem, Taylor's response is marked by his denial that a full analysis of action can be attained. Thus he writes that

> "While there is no informative way to analyze the concept of human action which is not at least question-begging, this does not preclude describing actions and thus trying to discover

> what it is that distinguishes them from everything else." (Taylor, 1966:99)

Although Taylor calls the problem of action 'the first that demands our attention' (p.89), his concern with it is almost entirely negative, and he is at pains to argue that one should not be lured into treating this problem as requiring an analysis of action. In his words,

> "Obviously... something more is contained in an act than in an otherwise similar motion that is not an act. We can say moreover, that acts are 'caused' by the agents who perform them. These elementary observations are enough to <u>set the trap</u>." (op. cit., p.89)

On the positive side, Taylor's view of the problem is that one can profitably consider the differences between actions and other occurrences (although this will not provide an analysis of action). He claims that

> "describing actions and thus trying to discover what it is that distinguishes actions from everything else ... can be philosophically useful if we can derive certain things from [it]... which are significant in themselves... and such that anyone who believes himself to be active, in the sense suggested by these descriptions, will also be likely to accept what is derived from them." (p.99)

From the features of action that are picked out as significant, we can see that such an approach is not concerned with locating a ground for the concept of action. For example, Taylor notes that

> "the first and most obvious thing... is that acts... are things which can without any

> incongruity be commanded, requested, or forbidden." (p.104)

> "an act, and even an act involving overt behaviour, need not be a change, but can be the absence of change." (p.106)

and again,

> "[a] most important thing to note is that there must always be an essential reference to an agent in the description of any act." (p.108-9)

Features of a similar type are selected as crucial to the concept of action, by David Rayfield, who suggests that

> "an item of behaviour, say running, qualifies as A's action if and only if: (1) A is running or has run; (2) someone, not necessarily A, could on some occasion decide to run; (3) A is responsible for running or for having run;and (4) A would give, if he were asked it, a candid, affirmative answer to 'Are you running?' or 'Did you run?'" (Rayfield, 1972)

Obviously such features are part of what we convey when we describe someone as acting; they serve as elucidations of our familiar concept of action. As such, they are essentially akin to the responses of Melden and Peters, for like these latter authors, Taylor and Rayfield are concerned to detail <u>what follows</u> from the facts of our regarding certain occurrences as actions, or how to fully understand the <u>use</u> of action expressions. Clearly, such semantic approaches to the problem of action are not concerned with <u>how</u> we come to regard occurrences as actions, if this means anything beyond the way in which we ordinarily apply the

concept. There is no question as to the ground for this conception nor with its justifiability. For this, we must turn to the other type of approach to the problem of action: the epistemic approach.

Unlike the semantic approaches, which begin from an assumption of familiarity with the concept of action and its application, the epistemic approach is specifically concerned with the legitimacy of this concept and the distinction we draw between actions and other events. Whereas the former approaches see the problem as one of explication or articulation, the latter sees it as a problem of justification. It views the distinction between actions and other occurrences as on a par with any other distinction, in that, to be legitimate, it must be founded upon a genuine difference between actions on the one hand and non-actional occurrences on the other. Thereby, the problem of action is the task of finding an adequate epistemological ground for the concept of action. It is, in this sense, the task of finding the difference between actions and other events.

What makes this a philosophical problem is that there is no readily discernible difference 'in the fabric of the world' that corresponds to the difference presupposed by our use of the concept of action, so it is not immediately obvious that the concept is legitimate. We have on this account, an example of what Leonard Goddard sees as a common form of philosophical problem:

> "What motivates a good deal of philosophical enquiry is that there often seems to be a gap between many of the ordinary beliefs we have and the evidence we have for them. And since the beliefs are not ones that we usually want to give up, a lot of philosophical discussion turns on the question of whether or not the gap can be filled. Sometimes the answer seems to be no, and there is then a tendency to become sceptical about the belief; sometimes the answer seems to be yes." (Goddard, 1977:Preface)

For an epistemic approach, the problem arises because of the apparent gap between our ordinary commitment to action and the evidence we have for such a belief. So, the task is one of trying to fill this gap and thereby show that the concept is well-founded.

There is a clear contrast between the semantic and the epistemic type of approach in the presuppositions that each is prepared to allow. In the former, primacy is granted to the view that we operate successfully with our distinction between actions and other events, and the question of understanding this distinction and the concept of action comes second to this fact. On the latter approach, the basic tenet is that the distinction must have an epistemological base, and must be shown to have such, if it is to be upheld as legitimate. Of course a semantic approach need not deny this last point, which may appear to be commonsensical in any case. Nevertheless, the semantic approach rests content in the belief (also commonsensical) that we all operate successfully with the concept of action. Hence it sees the problem not as that of securing an epistemological justification but rather as explaining how we go about successfully employing this distinction. Although the search

for such a base may seem pertinent to the task of explicating our use of the action-distinction, an important difference between the two types of approach is evident from the way in which failure in the enterprise would be viewed.

If the task is seen as the search for a sure epistemological base for the concept of action, then failure to secure this inevitably casts doubt on the propriety of the concept itself. On the other hand, since the semantic approach is concerned with elucidating what it accepts as basically sound, it will not view failure in this light. Far from challenging the legitimacy of the concept, it will simply suppose that the task has yet to be successfully completed, or that the person asking the question does not understand what it is he is asking for (hence, cannot recognise the explanation when it is presented to him). The difference between these two types of approach to the problem of action is crucial for I shall suggest that only the epistemic response engenders a truly philosophical account of the problem.

According to the semantic approaches, the problem is really one of explicating our distinction between actions and other events; this is a problem of articulating what, in a sense, is already familiar to us. Thus, according to Melden and Peters the task is one of expressing the appropriate rules for applying the concept. We simply have to make explicit what is already implicit in common usage. For Taylor and Rayfield the task is to detail what follows from our regarding something as an action. Again, this is a

matter of making clear what is already implicit in our use of the concept of action. But, in either case, if the problem is to articulate what we may be supposed already to know, then this is not a philosophical issue.

The fact, if it is one, that we have difficulty in expressing something may be of no direct philosophical significance. Even if everyone of us encounters this difficulty in the same specific area of knowledge, it is not thereby the concern of the philosopher. More plausibly, it would be the psychologist's job to explain such a generic verbal block.

Of course it may be said that the problem of action is not one of explaining how such articulatory problems arise, for this may indeed be a psychological question. The problem is simply that of performing the necessary articulation. This being so, and since philosopher's are often concerned to arbitrate on matters of what one can and cannot say, this may indeed fall under the domain of philosophy. But this is not plausible under the auspices of this semantic approach. Although the task is seen as one of articulation, and although philosophers may be more articulate than some, this does not render it a philosophical issue. This is especially so since it is assumed that we are all familiar with what is to be articulated, namely, the details of the use of our distinction between actions and other occurrences. Since we all have access to the raw data that is to be articulated, there is nothing in this representation of the problem of action that renders it of special philosophical interest.

With reference to Goddard, I have suggested that the epistemic approach bears the hallmark of a philosophical problem. We have a concept of action which requires the distinction between actions and other events, and we are firmly committed to this concept and distinction. What gives rise to the problem on this view is that there is no obvious epistemological basis for this distinction, hence it is not obvious that we are justified in our commitment to this concept. Here, the problem of action is construed as the task of locating an epistemological ground for our concept of action. It is an enquiry into the legitimacy of the concept. As such, it is philosophical in nature.

It is important to note that adopting a semantic approach does not thereby defuse the philosophical problem. Certainly, it may be more easily disregarded or ignored if one concentrates on another interpretation, but the epistemological problem does not disappear on adopting any semantic line of response. Indeed, it is logically basic to any such semantic approach. One can only set out to articulate the details of how to distinguish between actions and other occurrences on the assumption that this is fundamentally a valid distinction. This assumption is implicit in the semantic approaches but is precisely what is called into question on the epistemic account of the problem. So, this latter view is logically anterior to the former.

Seeing that the epistemic interpretation of the problem of action is properly understood to be a philosophical

concern, this naturally raises the issue of the appropriate sort of response to the problem thus conceived. We have met examples of semantic responses but as yet, none from the epistemic camp. At present, rather than offer such examples, I wish to consider the broader issue of the appropriate type of theory to meet the epistemic problem.

(3) SUITABLE SOLUTIONS

Since the task set by this conception of the problem is that of locating an epistemological basis for our action-distinction, any acceptable account of the nature of action must specify what it is 'in the nature of things', that characterises actions as distinct from non-actional occurrences.

To this end, it seems obvious that any theory of action which fails to identify (or advocate) some difference that could, at least in principle, be discerned, as a means of distinguishing actions, is playing the wrong game. Because there is a need to justify our conception of action, this could only be achieved in a satisfactory epistemological way, by indicating a candidate, which is at least theoretically discernible as a characteristic of action. If there is held to be no real difference between actions and other occurrences, there can be no justification for speaking as if there were. So what sort of theory of action may reasonably expect to meet the task of locating a ground for the concept? Clearly, we must look for a theory that lays great emphasis upon the difference between actions and

non-actions. One such account is the causal theory of action.

This theory expresses the nature of actions in terms of their unique causal ancestry. Thus, the required fundamental difference between action and mere occurrence is thereby located in the causes of these respective events. The causal theory maintains that actions form a class distinct from non-actions by virtue of their unique causal genesis. Such a response seems appropriate, since we may hope to characterise actions in terms of the specific type of cause (a unique sort of event in the world), that leads to action and not to anything that is not action. Yet, there is an additional contender for the title of 'acceptable theory of action'.

The alternative to a causal account lies with the traditional account of action in terms of volitions. Which theory characterises actions as events with a unique relation to agent's willing. Thus, we may hope to distinguish actions from other events on the assumption that only the former bear the requisite relation to those occurrences called 'volitions'.

The important aspect of each of these theories is that they are committed to expressing the nature of action in terms of a real difference in the fabric of the world. Furthermore, this is a difference which we can, in principle, discern. So, by some such theory we may hope to resolve the philosophical problem of action, as represented by the epistemic view of this issue.

In what follows, I shall argue that of these putative acceptable accounts of action, the causal approach fares badly in its attempt to detail the character of action, whereas, with judicious alterations, the volition theory can meet the demands of the problem of action.

CHAPTER 2 : THE CAUSAL ALTERNATIVE

(1) WAYWARD CAUSALITY

Having established that theories such as the causal and volitional accounts are correctly motivated for resolving the problem of action, in the present chapter I shall argue that the causal approach is vitiated by the problem of wayward causality, and that in consequence, it must be rejected as an adequate account of action.

The major difficulty on the causal approach is to explain how actions actually come to be performed. It is one thing to say that actions arise from particular desires and beliefs that together form a reason which causes the event to qualify as action (pace Davidson), but it is difficult to see how one's reason for doing something can produce the action. Certainly, we can understand the idea that such reasons cause events, still it is hard to accept that this is sufficient to render such events actions. This difficulty centres on whether we can construe reasons as executive. While it is standardly in the nature of volition to be executive, it is not clear that reasons can be so. Thus we are all familiar with having reasons for doing things that we do not in fact do. This suggests that reasons on their own need not result in action, so why suppose that they have executive power? Furthermore, if we are intent on adopting such a view we are obliged to explain why all reasons do not result in action. It looks as if something additional is

required to mediate between our reasons for acting and the action itself. This is the ideal role for volition.

Apparently, there is a significant gap between having a reason for doing something and doing it 'for that reason'. This is the gap that the causal account has difficulty in spanning, and this is most evident in examples of 'wayward causation'. Here, although the agent's behaviour results from his reason for doing what he does, he does not do it <u>for that reason</u> and consequently, his behaviour does not qualify as action.

An example is provided by Davidson in his article 'Freedom to act':

> "A climber might want to rid himself of the weight and danger of holding another man on a rope, and he might know that by loosening his hold on the rope he could rid himself of the weight and danger. This belief and want might so unnerve him as to cause him to loosen his hold, and yet it might be the case that he never <u>chose</u> to loosen his hold, nor did he do it intentionally." (Davidson, 1973:153-4)

Obviously Davidson's climber has a reason for releasing the rope, yet though his releasing it results from his reason, this does not capture the sense of the agent's doing it for the reason in question. The problem is that even if the behaviour is caused by the agent's reason for releasing the rope, this is not sufficient to render this an action. And this is serious for any attempted causal analysis of action. Indeed, Davidson goes so far as to say:

> "what I despair of spelling out is the way in

> which attitudes must cause actions if they are to rationalize the action." (op.cit., p.153)

In the face of this problem of wayward causal chains, the causal theory seems unable to pin down a single routing to the causality such as to be sure that the event thus produced will be action. This being so, such a theory is ill-equipped to resolve the problem of action, for it is unable to give an adequate characterisation of the fundamental difference between actions and other events. Hence, the problem of wayward causation is important firstly, because it highlights a deficiency in the causal approach, and secondly, because it can be altogether avoided on the volitional approach; although I shall reserve proof of this latter contention for later.

(2) GORR'S DEFENCE

Before dismissing the causal theory altogether it is worth noting that several recent writers have attempted to defend such a theory against wayward causality. (See for example, Armstrong, 1975:1-7; and McCullough, 1975; both of these attempts are discussed and ably dismissed by Michael Gorr in Gorr, 1979b. It is Gorr's own defence of the causal theory that I wish to consider.)

In particular, Michael Gorr argues that there is

> "a way of explicating our intuitive feeling of the connectedness of our volitions and our actions [which] is adequate to exclude counterexamples based upon the possibility of anomalous causal chains." (Gorr, 1979b:10)

We must note that Gorr's use of the term 'volition' does not indicate that he upholds a volitional as opposed to a causal account of action. He applies this term to the 'mental element' in action and does so only 'for convenience' (sic.).

Put simply, Gorr's strategy for overcoming the problem of wayward causation is to suggest that in acting, the agent is aware of an appropriate mode of execution, such that he can tell whether what occurs is or is not his action. This is based upon the view that we employ our muscles when we move, and have awareness of this muscular activity:

> "Although it is perhaps only infrequently that we actually pay attention to this sort of activity (usually this will be in cases... where the task involves a relatively great or unusual effort), it is nonetheless true that some muscular movement is involved in all cases of (overt) action." (op.cit., p.9)

Thereby,

> "action occurs only when an appropriate mental event initiates muscular activity which in turn initiates an appropriate bodily movement. Moreover... there is a 'characteristic manner' in which these events not only follow one another but, to put it somewhat metaphorically, flow into one another... because we conceive of our wants or intentions as initiating causal chains that lead uninterruptedly (via the associated muscular activity) to the overt manifestations of behaviour constitutive of the act itself." (op.cit., pp.9-10)

Gorr suggests that the appropriate mode of causality is from mental cause, through muscular activity to bodily movement. Consequently, should any event occur which

replaces an aspect in this sequence the resultant behaviour will not be action, and would ordinarily not be 'felt' to be action by the agent concerned. Any other events required for the action's occurrence, other than those in the chain of mental cause, muscular activity and bodily movement, would operate as auxiliaries to elements in this chain, otherwise the result may not qualify as action.

If we look again at Davidson's mountain climber example, we can see that Gorr's requirement disqualifies the climber's behaviour from being action because

> "the relevant causal chain involved at least one link that was neither identical nor concurrent with an element in either the agent's volition, his muscular effort or his behaviour, i.e. the nervous spasm which intervened to cause him to loosen his hold on the rope." (p.1Ø)

In Davidson's example, the agent's behaviour does not issue directly from his 'mental initiative', but from 'the intervention of an unexpected and foreign element in the production of his behaviour- the attack of nerves.' (p.11).

On the face of it, Gorr's position appears able to overcome examples like Davidson's climber. But this does not mean that the causal theory can adequately deal with the problem of wayward causality. There is a further variety of problem case, recognised by Gorr, which is not excluded on his criteria, as outlined so far. The following example (which we may call Variant 1) is given by Gorr:

"Suppose that Jones has a volition to raise his

> arm, that this is immediately followed by his experiencing the sensations characteristic of the appropriate muscular effort, and that this in turn is immediately followed by his arm's going up. Suppose further, however, that during the previous night, Smith had secretly rewired the relevant neural connections between Jones' brain and his arm so that, at the moment he (Jones) willed to raise his arm, Smith induced in him the characteristic sensations of effort (though these were unrelated to his volition) and then caused an impulse that produced the appropriate muscular contraction in his arm (though these were unrelated to his experience of muscular effort). All the conditions specified earlier appear to have been met, yet Jones was clearly deceived in so far as he believed that he experienced a 'natural' and uninterrupted flow from his willing to his behaviour. Consequently, we must conclude that he failed to act." (p.11)

Clearly, such a case presents difficulties for Gorr's position, for here we have an anomalous causal sequence which meets the requirements already outlined, yet we would not consider the culmination of this sequence as an instance of action. Although all that occurs 'feels right' to the agent in question, it does not follow that he has acted, even if he thinks he has. Hence, as we have them thus far, Gorr's criteria are not adequate to exclude such an example of deviant causality.

Obviously, Gorr is aware of this problem, and in order to accommodate such cases, he adds a further condition for the resultant behaviour to qualify as action. This condition is described by Gorr as

> "a very essential epistemic requirement, viz., that the agent know that his volition will result (or at least probably result) in behaviour in a way that is consonant with the other conditions." (pp.11-12)

With this further qualification the counterexample above is ruled out. Since Jones is ignorant of Smith's role in the proceedings he could not know that his arm would rise as a result of his having willed it. Thereby, Gorr concludes that

> "for something to constitute an action... it appears necessary to require not only that certain objective connectivity conditions be satisfied but that the agent have knowledge that they will be satisfied..." (p.12)

In this manner, Gorr believes he has avoided the problem of wayward causation, but I would not agree to the validity of his 'epistemic condition'. Clearly, this condition does overcome the counterexample in question, but this is not sufficient ground for accepting it. Furthermore, I shall offer reasons for rejecting this knowledge requirement as a condition for action.

My first consideration concerns an example discussed by Godfrey Vesey (Vesey, 1961; derived from James, 1890:105), where we have a subject with an anaesthetised arm. This subject is asked to raise his arm whilst blindfolded and upon removing the blindfold is surprised to find that his arm has not moved. Obviously there is some obscurity in this example as to what we should say about this agent's 'action', for it is unclear whether he has in fact acted at all. Nevertheless, it is clear that the subject's arm may not rise even when he thinks it will. There may be nothing in what he 'feels' that tells him whether his arm will or will not rise under such circumstances. So there will come a

time, as the anaesthesia wears off, when after further failure to raise his arm, the subject successfully raises his limb.

In this case it is clear that the subject does not know that his arm will rise when he tries to raise it, hence Gorr's epistemic condition is not met when, as the anaesthesia wears off, the agent first successfully raises his arm.

On commonsense grounds, we would allow such an instance as full-blooded action. If the anaesthesia has worn off and the subject raises his arm, then he has acted, even on the assumption that he did not know that his arm would respond as normal.

The alternative, to which Gorr is committed, given the failure of his epistemic condition, is to disqualify the subject's moving his arm as not action. Gorr must suppose that the agent did not act till after he learned that his arm would respond, which excludes the possibility that he learns this by raising his arm. Or, strictly, if the subject learns that the anaesthesia has worn off by moving his arm, then his moving his arm is not an action. This would be strange. How then should we class his arm raising? Certainly it is not a nervous response; it is not the result of a deviant causal chain. In fact it would pass muster as an action save for meeting Gorr's requirement that the agent know that what he wills will occur.

In similar fashion, Gorr must describe the process of

learning to move one's limbs as beginning with limb movements which are actions in every respect except that the young agent did not know when he initiated them, that they would occur.

It seems to me peculiar to suppose that we must move our limbs at least once before we can be said to be capable of action. More naturally, we would describe such 'first doings' as actions in their own right. So, my first argument against Gorr's epistemic condition is to the effect that such a requirement would exclude cases of action which are not in themselves problematical. If we have actions which we must disqualify on Gorr's epistemic condition, then this condition will not do; it cannot be validly employed to exclude problem cases of wayward causation if it also excludes non-problematical examples of action. In addition, Gorr's criterion has serious implications for all instances of action, as I shall show in my second argument.

Looking closely at the counterexample in which Jones's arm raising is disqualified from being action, we see that what Jones failed to know was that Smith was interfering with the 'normal' sequence of the action. In particular, what Jones did not know was the presence of a feature in this causal sequence other than his mental cause, his muscular activity, and his arm movement. This feature was Smith's interference; the reason Gorr gives for disqualifying Jones's arm raising.

From this we should be able to conclude that if there is a causally effective factor in the sequence producing the

bodily movement which is additional to the mental cause, muscle contractions and bodily movement, and the agent is ignorant of the role played by this factor, then the resultant movement fails to qualify as action.

This is our generalisation from Gorr's own example, whereby Jones's arm raising is disqualified because he is ignorant of the part played by Smith in producing this arm movement. From this general statement of Gorr's epistemic condition we can consider how it would apply to a normal instance of Jones raising his arm.

Under normal circumstances when Jones acts to raise his arm, there occurs, in Jones, a mental cause followed by muscular contractions, then his arm rising. Furthermore, Jones has the required feeling of 'connectedness' with regard to this sequence of events. Yet, surely there are additional factors in this causal sequence other than mental cause, muscular activity, and bodily movement. There must, for example, be nerve impulses to connect the mental cause with the muscles. And who is to say that there are not other factors essential to the sequence which are neither identical nor concurrent with these three 'recognised' features?

The significance of these additional features is that they are necessary for the action sequence and are distinct from the mental cause, muscle contractions and bodily movement. Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that agents are normally unaware of the part played by such additional features in their action sequences.

It follows from the fact that Gorr's knowledge requirement will disqualify as action, every sequence in which the agent lacks knowledge of any effective factor (distinct from mental cause, muscular contractions and bodily movement), that every action sequence would be disqualified. For, in every such sequence there will be effective factors of which the agent has no knowledge whatsoever. Clearly Gorr's knowledge requirement is no more than an ad hoc means of overcoming a particularly awkward example of wayward causation. Although it does achieve this much, it would, at best, also exclude acceptable instances of action, and, at worst, would entail the total abolition of action, which is absurd. We can see therefore that Gorr fails to deal adequately with Variant 1 of wayward causation, which is surprising, since there is an obvious response to this sort of problem case.

(3) RESOLVING GORR'S PROBLEM

The details of Variant 1 resist the criteria Gorr uses to overcome the original problem of wayward causation (as instanced in Davidson's climber). In this case, the putative agent Jones has the appropriate feelings of 'connectedness' and the sequence of mental cause, muscle contractions, and bodily movement occur as specified in Gorr's criteria. Yet we should not allow that Jones raised his arm in the sense of being the agent of the arm rising.

According to Gorr, this is because the 'knowledge requirement' is not satisfied, when Jones is deceived into

believing that he experiences a 'natural and uninterrupted flow from his willing to his behaviour'. We have seen that Gorr's knowledge condition is not acceptable as a criterion for action. How then do we explain our unease with Variant 1?

The solution is simple. In such a case the raising of Jones's arm does not count as Jones's action because it is Smith's action. We disqualify Jones as agent precisely because of the role Smith plays, and since Smith plays an active role, the event brought about (Jones's arm going up) should be attributed to Smith as his action.

It is apparent that when Smith ' induced in [Jones]... the characteristic sensations of effort... and then caused an impulse that produced the appropriate muscular contractions in [Jones's]... arm' (p.11), Smith is active. Smith it is, who produces the relevant effects in Jones, including the arm movement, hence, Smith, and not Jones, is the agent.

We may generalise on this insight and note that whenever someone acts as a result of another's stimulus (in this case Jones's mental cause), the agent of the deed in question will be whoever is closest (in causal terms) to the deed itself. Thus, in Variant 1, Smith (as agent) is causally closer to the arm raising than Jones, despite the fact that it is Jones's arm.

Even if Jones does something in producing the appropriate mental cause, the fact that this leads, through

Smith's actions, to the arm movement fails to render it Jones's action. This is the point, noted by Aune (Aune, 1974:115), that 'agency is not transitive through persons'.

We can now see why Variant 1 is not Jones's action; because it is Smith's. But the fact that this variety of wayward causation is easily resolved does not reinstate Gorr's criteria for action, i.e. those he invokes to overcome Davidson's climber example, for there is a further variant for which Gorr's criteria fail.

This variant (Variant 2) of wayward causation is derived from Gorr's Variant 1. But here, instead of an interfering Smith, we have Jones connected without his knowledge to an electronic 'black box'. This unit takes over the role previously played by Smith, but does not depend upon action on Smith's part.

We can now suppose that Jones has the appropriate combination of belief and desire to raise his arm. Immediately upon the occurrence of this combination in Jones, the 'black box' automatically induces in Jones the characteristic sensations of effort, and then causes an impulse that produces the appropriate muscle contractions in Jones's arm. When Jones's arm is raised in this fashion, Gorr's criteria for action are satisfied, but do we have an action on the part of Jones? The precise answer is 'maybe'.

Our 'black box' need not disqualify the arm going up from being Jones's action. Nevertheless, what occurs need not be action by Jones. From Davidson's climber example, we

know that having a reason for a particular action may cause the relevant deed without its thereby being action. In other words, it does not follow that the deed is done for the reason in question, even if it was done because of that reason.

The same facts apply in Variant 2. The fact that Jones has the requisite reason, plus the resultant deed's being caused by Jones's reason, does not preclude the possibility that Jones did not do it for this reason. We know from our first example of deviant causation that being caused by a reason is not a sufficient condition of action. Variant 2 indicates that Gorr's supplement to this, in terms of the agent having the appropriate feeling of 'connectedness' between the key elements in the causal sequence, and this sequence taking its 'normal' course from mental cause through muscular contractions to bodily movement, does not suffice as a criterion of action.

This being the case, the causal account of action remains in an unacceptable state, for it is unable to detail the essential difference between actions and other events. Unless the problem of wayward causation in Variant 2 (and in any subsequent forms), can be resolved, the causal theory is neutered, and we must look elsewhere for an adequate account of the nature of action. The obvious place to look is the volition theory, for we shall find that it is not susceptible to wayward causation. With this in mind, I turn now to consider what may be termed the 'traditional' account of action, in terms of volitions.

CHAPTER 3 : VOLITION

(1) THE CLASSICAL THEORY OF VOLITION

As a source for the traditional, or classical theory of volitions we can look to writers such as Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Reid, and Mill. All of these, to differing extents, explicitly avowed a volitional approach to understanding action. Considering the views of these authors we shall detect many of the aspects of the 'dogma of volitions' that have come to cause concern and dispute in modern action theory.

My purpose in this section is to cast a cursory eye over the volitional theory as found in these classical sources.

The origin of our idea of volition seems to lie in our impression that we can initiate events in the world; that we have the power or ability to determine at least part of what occurs around us. It is almost taken for granted, as 'datum', that we are conscious of such a power. Thus, according to Locke:

> "we find in ourselves a Power to begin or forbear, continue or end, several actions of our minds and motions of our Bodies, barely by the thought or preference of the mind... This Power is that which we call the Will. The actual exercise of that power, by directing any particular action or forbearance, is that which we call Volition or Willing." (Essay, p.236)

in Hume:

> "We are every moment conscious of internal power... we feel that by the simple command of our will, we can move the organs of our body, or direct the faculties of our mind." (Enquiry, p.64)

> "By the will. I mean nothing but the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any motion of our body, or new perception of our mind." (Treatise, p.399)

Also in Reid:

> "Everyman is conscious of a power to determine things which he conceives to depend upon his determination. To this power we give the name of will." (Essays, p.57)

This being the case, if we are conscious of such a power, then of course it follows that we have such a power. We cannot be aware of X if X does not exist. On the other hand, we may be mistaken in our belief, in which case, though we reckon that we are aware of a power to determine events, what we are aware of may not be such a power. This may be some false impression. Whereby, just as the fact that we feel ourselves to be free is no argument against the impugning of freedom by determinism, our 'awareness' of active power, does not establish the reality of such power.

Still, this active power of which we are conscious, is to be explained in terms of volition. Volition is the act of determining; the exercise of the power. 'Will' is the power itself:

> "To this power we give the name of will... the act of determining [is]... properly called volition." (Essays, loc. cit.)

Beside the fact that volitions occur as the exercise of our active power there appears to be little that can be said of volitions themselves. Locke asserts that volition is itself an action, though one which is best understood by reflection and considering what happens when one wills (op.cit.). In like fashion, Hume describes the impression of active power as impossible to define (Treatise, p.399).

Still, one might ask whether it is clear that we are conscious of volitions. There appears to be a lack of clarity on whether we are aware of volitions themselves, as opposed to our power of will. In being conscious of 'a power', as Locke, Hume and Reid suggest, are we thereby conscious of our volitions?

Since Hume calls 'the will' an internal impression felt when we 'knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind' (loc. cit.), we can presume that when a volition takes place we are conscious of it, as an exercise of our active power. Yet it may be unclear whether we have awareness of the act of volition and thereby of our power, or whether acts of volition are posited in order to explain our consciousness of power.

Reid seems confident on this matter. He distinguishes instinctive and habitual deeds, such as blinking, from voluntary deeds, such as closing one's eyes when told to do so. The basis for this distinction is his view that

voluntary deeds must invoke some conception on the part of the agent, of what he wills. As evidence, he cites the fact that no one is ever aware of willing to blink whenever he does blink (Essays, pp.59-60). Thus, Reid suggests that in voluntary deeds we are conscious of our willing the deed (of our volition), while in instinctive and habitual deeds we are aware of no volition.

The difficulty with Reid's position is that he seems to equate our having some conception of what we are willing in voluntary deeds, with our awareness of willing, or of having a volition. Reid's class of voluntary deeds are characterised as those deeds which involve some conception in the agent of what he wills, yet it may be true that, in voluntary action, I have a conception of what I am willing, say, to close my eyes, without it being the case that I conceive of 'closing my eyes' as <u>something that I will</u>.

It may be that in voluntarily closing my eyes I must conceive of 'my closing my eyes', without thereby conceiving of my eyes closing as a result of <u>my willing</u> to close my eyes. For I may conceive of my closing my eyes, as a necessary part of closing my eyes, without having any conception of volition whatever. It is far from clear from Reid's position that the agent must be aware of <u>his willing</u>, or <u>the occurrence of his volition</u>, in voluntary action. Obviously, the fact that no one is aware of willing to close his eyes when he blinks does not establish that he must be aware of such a thing when voluntarily closing his eyes. There may, in the latter case, be awareness of what one is

doing without the agent conceiving of his willing to close his eyes. In consequence, it remains an open question whether we are aware of our volitions, even though voluntary actions involve us in conceiving of what we are doing, say, in closing our eyes.

In contrast, it may be said that we must be aware of our volitions if such acts are the exercise of our active power. After all, how could we be aware of having such power if not aware of exercising it? And, since our volitions are the instances of our exercising this power, if we are conscious of this power, we can only be so through awareness of our volitions, and what they can do.

This position is supported by Mill:

> "the volition... is the antecedent [in the causal sequence of action]; the motion of our limbs in conformity to the volition is the consequent... The antecedent, and indeed the consequent are subjects of consciousness..." (Logic, p.232)

Mill also cites Hamilton as endorsing the view that

> "the internal act of mental determination [is something] of which we are cognisant." (Lectures; cited in Mill, loc.cit.)

Although, as Mill and Hume suggest, we may have no immediate consciousness of 'moving through one's volitions', one is nevertheless aware of willing (having the volition), and the movement which is its effect. In consequence, it seems most plausible to account for our awareness of active power via our awareness of the exercise of this power, viz.

through awareness of volitions (through awareness of acts of will).

Let us accept for the moment that we can be conscious of our acts of will. What then can be said of the nature of these volitions?

The difficulty here is that when one attempts to characterise attributes of mind one's descriptive faculties seem limited. Hence, Locke describes willing as

> "a very simple act, and whosoever desires to understand what it is, will better find it by reflecting on his own mind, and observing what it does when it wills, than by any variety of articulate sounds whatsoever." (Essay, p.249)

Really, this is Locke's way of saying that he can say very little about the nature of willing. Hume is more direct:

> "this impression [of willing] 'tis impossible to define..." (Treatise, p.399)

though he adds that

> 'volition is surely an act of the mind, with which we are sufficiently acquainted." (Enquiry, p.69)

Despite this vagueness on what can be said about volition, some reassurance may be drawn from an observation made recently by Bruce Aune, who notes that

> "The fact that we cannot form images of our thoughts, or discern the material features they possess, does not warrant the conclusion that we

> do not think at all. The same holds true for those volitional thoughts called 'acts' of willing." (Aune, 1974:109)

This lesson is well taken by those who would otherwise attach great significance to the lack of information on the nature of volitions, or acts of will.

Although there is uncertainty on just what can be said about volition, it is generally agreed that volitions produce effects which are usually bodily movements or new thoughts in the mind. Importantly, the relation between volition and its effect is construed causally. Thus, from Mill, we find that

> "volition is... simply a physical cause. Our will causes our bodily actions in the same sense, and in no other as cold causes ice, or a spark causes an explosion of gunpowder." (Logic, loc. cit.)

while Hume describes the will as 'a cause' with a contingent connection with its effect (Treatise, Appendix, p.632), and talks of acts of volition 'producing motion' in our limbs (Enquiry, p.64).

Reid, on the other hand, is vague on the role of volition in producing our movements. He suggests that when we will to do a thing,

> "the volition is accompanied with an effort to execute that which we willed." (Essays, p.63)

Here, we may suppose that the effort to execute what we have willed to do is the physical correlate of our volition, whereby, the effort, and not the volition would be the

physical cause of our bodily movement.

Alternatively, we might imagine that such effort is the first 'significant' physical effect of our volition, and thereby, merely an 'intermediate' cause of our movement. The remaining difficulty would be the idea that every action need involve some exertion of effort on the part of the agent; though such a thesis has been defended recently by Hugh McCann (McCann, 1972).

As to further characterising volitions, it is generally held that volitions (acts of will), are actions, presumably on a par with overt bodily actions.

Thus, Locke explicitly describes willing or volition as an action (Essay, p.245) and, like Hume, calls volitions 'acts of mind' (Essay, p.249; Enquiry, p.69), or as Reid puts it, 'the acts of the power to determine things conceived to depend upon one's determination' (Essays, p.57).

Later, this characterisation of volitions as actions in their own right brought serious criticisms against the volition theory. In particular, if we are to employ the concept of volition to make sense of the notion of action, then so long as volitions are construed as actions, they offer no hope as clarification of the character of action. We cannot hope to articulate the nature of action in terms of actions, albeit actions of a different order, for thereby the nature of action would remain a mystery.

To his credit, Mill did not accord with the

assimilation of volitions to actions. He is adamant that an action is

> "not one thing but a series of two things; the state of mind called a volition, followed by an effect. The volition... to produce the effect is one thing; the effect produced in consequence... is another thing, the two together constitute the action." (Logic, p.35)

Clearly, on this view, volition is not an action but a component of action. Consequently, there remains the possibility of using 'volition' as an explanatory concept to underpin that of 'action'. (More will be said of the advantages of such an analysis of action in subsequent chapters.)

Mill goes further in his characterisation of volition, and identifies it with the agent's intention or purpose (loc. cit.). Initially, at least, this assimilation of volition to intention or purpose is unconvincing. The main drawback is that we often have both intentions and purposes which do not lead to action. Of course it is open to Mill to reply that not all intentions or purposes are volitions. Specifically, those intentions or purposes are volitions which <u>do</u> lead to action.

While this rejoinder may be plausible, it leaves a mystery of the important difference between intentions and purposes which do not lead to action and those which do. Additionally, Mill's identification of volition with intention may face the objection that it excludes the possibility of unintentional actions. After all, if actions

are produced by volitions, and volitions are intentions, then it appears that all actions must be intentional. In fact, this difficulty is easily overcome, for we may understand unintentional actions as the unwanted or unexpected results of one's volitions. Thereby, on Mill's account, unintentional actions will be the unwanted or unexpected results of the intentions which lead to (intentional) action.

Similar comments apply to the assimilation, suggested at one point by Hume, between volition and choice (Treatise, p.467). Obviously one can choose to do something yet not do it. So not all choices can be volitions. Furthermore, to identify volitions with those choices which do lead to action generates a puzzle as to the difference between effective choices (volitions) and ineffective choices (which do not lead to action).

If choices (or intentions) are to be executive acts, only <u>on some occasions</u>, further explanation is required as to how on such occasions the choices (intentions) are effective in bringing about actions. In other words, what makes a choice (intention) executive?

It is strange however that we should be asking how actions come to be executed <u>after</u> introducing volitions into the explanation. After all, volitions are of their nature executive, so it is precisely their job to explain how such mental features as beliefs, desires, intentions and choices lead to action. In consequence, while it appears attractive, with an eye to parsimony, to identify volition with

intention, choice, purpose or something of the sort, the remaining puzzle of how such a feature becomes executive does injustice to the explanatory potential of volition. Indeed, by not identifying volition with such features, though we add an item to our theoretical inventory, the resultant explanation of how actions derive from our mental states is all the more streamlined, since it removes the enigma of how such mental features become executive.

Although he does not strictly identify volition with choice, Hobbes represents volitions as the last appetite or aversion in deliberation. Thus, volition is the appetite or aversion 'immediately adhering to the action' (Leviathan, p.46).

Since he identifies volition with the last appetite or aversion in deliberation, Hobbes has an answer to the objection that not all appetites or aversions lead to action hence cannot all be volitions. Hobbes specifies that volitions are those appetites or aversions which occur immediately prior to action.

Again, this leaves unexplained the significance of those appetites and aversions which 'happen' to lead to action. For Hobbes, the question would remain, 'what makes an appetite or aversion a volition?' So far as his account goes, the answer could be 'coincidence'.

Despite the sparsity of description of volitions, several formal features are indicated. Thus, Reid notes that 'every act of will must have an object' (Essays, p.59), and

'the immediate object of will must be some action of our own' (p.60). Locke seems to express the same point where he says

> "the will or power of volition is conversant about nothing but our own actions." (Essay, p.250)

Thus, the object of one's will is that which one wills, for he that wills 'must will something' (Reid:Essays, p.59).

Reid goes further and suggests that the necessary presence of an object when one wills constitutes the essential difference between voluntary and other deeds. Thus,

> "the person who wills must have some conception, more or less distinct, of what he wills... By this, things done voluntarily are distinguished from things done merely from instinct, or merely from habit." (loc. cit.)

In contrast to the suggestions that the object of volition be one's action, it may be more plausible to think otherwise. If what I will is my action then when I raise my arm the object of my volition is my raising my arm, for this was my action. Yet it seems improper to say 'I will that I should raise my arm'. More familiarly, we may say 'I will that my arm should rise', or 'I will my arm to rise'. If what one wills is that one's arm rise, rather than that one should raise one's arm, then the object of one's volition is not <u>the action</u> of raising one's arm, but <u>the movement</u> which is the arm's rising.

Furthermore, there is reason to suppose that the object of one's volition cannot be one's action. Thus, in order that I raise my arm I must have a volition which results in my arm rising. That is, my arm must rise as a result of my willing. If what I will (the object of my volition) is my action, then what I will is not merely my arm rising but what makes my arm rising an action of arm raising. What makes this difference is my volition. Hence, in order to will my action, rather than merely the movement, I must will my volition, which is to say, I must will my willing.

This reduction argument indicates the impropriety of supposing that what we will is action. The object of our volition is more plausibly the logically necessary 'effect' of such an action. Hence, in the arm raising example, what I will (the object of my volition) is the movement of my arm, and not my bringing about that movement.

We have seen that both Locke and Reid insist that volition embody the conception of an object, this object being, in their view, the action which the volition is intended to bring about. Yet there is a further peculiarity in this notion.

It is difficult to see how we could ever learn to act, or perform a first action if such an action requires us to will, with a volition that embodies a conception of the action we are to perform. If we are ever to learn how to bring about those things that we want to bring about, we must begin by <u>finding out</u> what things we can bring about. The implausible alternative is to suppose that we begin with

a prior conception of the actions we are able to perform. Here it is worth noting Mill's point that 'our consciousness of volition contains no a priori knowledge that its effect will follow' (Logic, p.233). Nor, we may add, does it contain a priori knowledge of what its effect will ordinarily be. We must accord with Hume, that we tell the results of our volitions by experience (Enquiry, p.65ff.). So, it is through experience that we learn what can reasonably be an object of will. Having such an object in mind cannot be a logical prerequisite for action, or we would be required to have a conception of action prior to ever acting.

Further investigation reveals that the general characterisations of 'will' and 'volition' offered by Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Reid all fall foul of the above failing.

Hobbes presents volition as part of the process of deliberation, which is the process of considering what we might do and why. So what we consider is which action, if any, to execute. Once again, we seem to have a precondition on performing action which implies that no one could ever act in the first instance. There cannot be a first action, if this requires prior consideration of which action to perform (deliberation). For this would require that prior to ever performing any action we had developed the capacity to consider which action to execute. Clearly, the execution of action must be logically anterior to such deliberation. Since there are actions, it follows that action cannot, by

its nature, require prior deliberation. (Of course this does not mean that we cannot learn to deliberate after learning how to act. The point is that acting is logically basic to deliberating about action.)

A similar argument is effective against the general characterisation of will proffered by Reid, Locke and Hume. They insist that the ability to act is a conscious power to determine things that we conceive to be within our power. But this represents our ability to act as requiring that we conceive of what it is in our power to do, which once again, would render it impossible for anyone to perform a first action. For in order to act for the first time one would be required to conceive of what actions one could perform, which is to demand prescience of the agent.

As with Hobbes' characterisation, we cannot require as a precondition of action that the agent have a prior conception of action. It may be true that having learned how to perform various actions we generally bear in mind what we can do and how we can do the things that we have learned to do. But the point remains that such a conception is logically dependent on a prior ability to act. So it would appear that neither Hobbes, Reid, Locke, nor Hume represent the will in a fashion that would make action an initial possibility.

We shall find that this issue arises again in connection with William James, and the account he gives of willing. Meanwhile, in concluding our summary of these classical sources for the volitional account of action, we

might restate what appear to be the salient details attributable to such a theory:

(1) Volition is construed as a mental act, which is an action in its own right.

(2) The influence of the will (the relation between volitions and their effects) is causal in nature.

(3) Volition (willing) is something which we are conscious of, though we have no awareness of how volitions come to have the effects they have. We are conscious of a power to determine things (that we take to be within our power).

(4) The act of volition is difficult (or impossible) to characterise.

(5) A volition (act of will) always has an object, which is that which one wills. The immediate object of volition is one's action.

(6) It is the relation of volition to action that distinguishes 'the voluntary' from other deeds and sufferings.

The point of listing such details is that they show us the sort of views that have come to be expected from anything purporting to be a volition theory of action. This is not to suggest that anyone who calls himself a volition theorist, nor indeed any of the aforementioned authors, must

adhere to all of these particulars.

Much of what I have to say in the forthcoming chapters will be concerned with changing these specifications for those that I deem more appropriate for an acceptable account of action in terms of volition. To this end, I turn next to a theory of the will, which, at least initially, seems very much at odds with the more traditional approach just encountered.

(2) JAMES ON THE WILL

We have seen that the dogma of volitions is well represented in the writings of Locke, Reid, Hume, Hobbes, and Mill. Indeed, there may be sufficient unity of doctrine to distinguish what we might call 'the traditional volitional account'; the main features being that volition is a mental event, and one which leads causally to action. Although many subsequent writers maintained a belief in volitions, William James, for one, opted for a view different in important respects from the traditional theory. Indeed, there are several interesting lessons to be learned from a detailed look at James on the will.

James begins his account of the will by distinguishing the state of mind called 'willing' from desiring and wishing. In keeping with Hume and Locke, he comments that these are states of mind,

> "which everyone knows and which no definition can make plainer." (James, 1890:486)

The difference between wishing and willing is that, if with the desire for some end 'there goes a sense that attainment is not possible, then we simply wish'. Whereas, if we believe the end to be within our power, 'we will that the desired feeling, having, or doing shall be real; and real it presently becomes' (loc. cit.).

Like Reid and Locke, we find James claiming that the only 'direct' outward effects of our will are bodily movements. Such movements are 'the only ends which follow immediately upon our willing.' Furthermore, since such movements are desired and intended beforehand, they 'are done with full prevision of what they are to be.'

This last fact leads James to conclude that voluntary movements are not logically basic, that is,they

> "must be secondary not primary functions of our organism." (p.487)

Here, James is acknowledging the point, which we made previously in relation to the views of Hume, Hobbes, Locke, and Reid, that if voluntary movement requires the prior conception of what the voluntary movement is to be, then there is a problem as to how such a voluntary movement can be performed in the first place. As James puts it, if in voluntary action the act must be forseen, it follows that

> "no creature not endowed with divinatory power can perform an act voluntarily for the first time." (p.487)

From this, once again, in keeping with Hume and Mill, James supposes that we learn all our possibilities by way of experience. Hence, in order to perform a specific voluntary action, say, a particular movement, the movement must have 'once occurred in a random, reflex, or involuntary way' and 'left an image of itself in the memory', whereupon, 'the movement can be desired again, proposed as an end, and deliberately willed' (p.487). This is what James means by describing voluntary movement as a secondary function of our organism, for it logically requires that there be some other-than-voluntary movements, in order that we be able to learn to act voluntarily.

One feature which may cause confusion arises from James's contention that 'no creature not endowed with divinatory power can perform an act voluntarily for the first time'. Here there is a possible confusion between two different, though related, claims. James may be saying that the prevision requirement in voluntary movement presents a problem as to how one is able to perform one's first voluntary action. This is the point we met in the previous section. Yet James may wish to make a stronger claim, namely that this prevision requirement generates a problem as to how we perform <u>each distinct voluntary movement</u> for the first time.

Following James's logic, the former point would have us suppose that some movement (at least one movement) occurred in an other-than-voluntary fashion as a requirement for our learning to move voluntarily. The latter point suggests that

each voluntary movement of which we are capable, must have been preceded by an other-than-voluntary occurrence of that movement, in order that we learn how to make that particular movement voluntarily.

If, as James suggests, an image of our movement must be stored in our memory before we can desire that movement, and deliberately will it, we would require an image for each of our possible voluntary movements. Hence, he must imagine that for each such movement, it must have occurred in an other-than-voluntary fashion in order that we learn to bring it about voluntarily.

One worry about this is that we would have no reason to expect that everyone learn to perform the same repertoire of movements, since what they learn is dependent upon the 'accidental' occurrence of these movements. It would be a happy coincidence if the same range of movements occurred in an other-than-voluntary way, for each and every person. Yet there seems to be no reason to suppose that by an early age we have not all learned pretty well the same range of voluntary movements.

James does allow that we can learn to perform some movements by observing similar movements in others, nevertheless, this detracts from the requirement that we have an image of the movement in question, in order to will that movement.

Perhaps it is more plausible to deny that there is a problem over learning to perform each voluntary movement,

while accepting the problem over learning to perform one's first voluntary movement. After all, having once found that we can bring about a particular movement, this could well lead us to experiment in order to see whether we can bring about any other. Thereby, learning to perform one voluntary movement may be sufficient cue for a process of practical inquiry through which one may quickly learn what scope one has for voluntary movement.

James's commitment to 'mental samples' of our movements, as a requirement for any voluntary bringing about of movement, is part and parcel of his theory of volition.

According to the traditional view, action is explained in terms of movements caused by volitions. Hence, what makes a movement voluntary is the fact that it originates in, or more precisely, is an effect of volition. James's story is more elaborate than this.

In the first place, James maintains that many of our actions involve no specific prior occurrence of volition. As he puts it, there is no

> ".. additional mental antecedent in the shape of a fiat, decision, consent, volitional mandate, or other synonymous phenomenon of consciousness, before the movement can follow ... " (p.522)

Of such cases, we may well ask how the movements come about voluntarily if not by means of volition. We must note however that we have here two questions, and not one. Firstly, we can ask how such movements occur at all, and

secondly, how their occurrence qualifies as voluntary if volitions have no role in their production.

To the former, the answer James gives is that these movements arise naturally from our ideas of their 'sensible effects'. Indeed, he goes so far as to represent this pattern as the 'essence' of voluntary action. Thus, he states that

> "... the first point to start from in understanding voluntary action and the possible occurrence of it with no fiat or express resolve, is the fact that consciousness is in its very nature impulsive... Every pulse of feeling which we have is the correlate of some neural activity that is already on its way to instigate a movement." (p.526)

From this one might suppose that James is misrepresented when described as a volition theorist. Apparently, he wishes to characterise action without recourse to any 'fiat', 'express resolve' or 'volitional mandate'. Yet how do these voluntary movements, which James describes as instances of 'ideo-motor action', qualify as voluntary in the absence of even any close relative of volition?

The answer to this question becomes all the more obscure when we learn that James distinguishes this form of voluntary behaviour, from another, for which 'an additional conscious element has to intervene and precede the movement' (p.522). In such cases we do have what James calls a 'fiat' or 'volitional mandate'. This makes it clear that James is a believer in volitions but it does not explain how we are to

understand his two-fold classification of voluntary movements.

It may appear that James is confused as to what qualifies these two types of action as voluntary. In the first place, he claims that there are voluntary movements that involve no 'volitional mandate', yet he also avows that 'the fiat, the element of consent or resolve that the act shall ensue... constitutes the essence of the voluntariness of the act'(p.501). How can such a fiat constitute the essence of voluntariness in actions which involve no such fiat?

Perhaps James means to say that such a fiat is the essence of the act's voluntariness only in cases where such fiats, or volitions actually occur. Then, of course, there may be other actions whose essential voluntariness consists in something other than such a fiat. Yet James seems to disallow this option, for he describes this fiat as 'a constant coefficient, affecting all voluntary actions alike' (p.501). Can this apparent contradiction in James's account of voluntary movements be resolved?

One possible resolution is to ascribe to James's two-fold account of voluntary movement, a two-fold account of volition. Thus, there may be a sense in which 'simple' ideo-motor actions involve a volition so as to qualify as voluntary, and a distinct sense in which 'non-simple' voluntary movements involve a volition, whereby they also qualify as voluntary. In this way, we might be able to say, with James, that it is this fiat (volition) that is the

essence of a movement's voluntariness, even though the nature and the role of volition differ between the two types of voluntary movement. Yet this is very abstract, and in need of some support to lend credence to the view that this accurately represents James's position.

(3) THE 'VOLITIONAL STATE'

According to Godfrey Vesey:

> "In the psychology books of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the dogma of volitions was held in a particular form. This was that the 'volitional state' which we have to produce in ourselves in order to move some part of our body is an uninhibited thought of the movement occurring (or what it would be like for the movement to be occurring). This was known as the Ideo-motor theory." (Vesey, 1965:59)

Perhaps this concept of a 'volitional state' is the key we need to make sense of the apparent inconsistency in James's account. If the state which leads to every instance of voluntary movement can be aptly termed 'volitional', then we may be able to unite both the simple and more complex instances of voluntary movements as voluntary for the same reason, viz., their relation to this volitional state. What will then distinguish the simple from the complex voluntary movement is that the latter require a 'volitional mandate' in order to achieve the volitional state, while the former require no such mandate. This accords with James's assertion that 'the anticipation of the movement's sensible effects [the volitional state] must precede it [the movement] in order that it be voluntary' (p.521).

So, we can see James's account as involving two aspects of volition. Firstly, and for the concept of voluntariness most important, is 'the state of volition'; in Vesey's terms, 'the uninhibited thought of the movement's occurring'. Secondly, there is the 'volitional mandate', which is required on some occasions, to produce this volitional state.

To fully grasp what James has in mind, we have to look in more detail at the nature both of the volitional state, and the volitional mandate. The volitional state is described as 'the uninhibited idea of the movement occurring', or 'the idea of the movement's sensible effects'. For simple ideo-motor action (simple voluntary movement), this state is considered 'sufficient mental cue' for the movement to follow (p.552). One worry that this raises is that on this scheme, the resultant movement would appear to be <u>suffered</u> rather than <u>performed</u> by the agent. He has an idea in mind, of what it feels like for his arm to rise, and thereupon, his arm rises. On this view, one would have to be careful of the ideas one has, otherwise our bodies might make movements that we do not wish to make. An element of agent's desire or approval for the resulting movement seems to be lacking in this account of ideo-motor action. What would make such movements voluntary rather than mere <u>reflex responses</u> to one's ideas? Where is the 'voluntary making' element in such movements?

James's response seems straightforward. Although in simple ideo-motor action there need be no 'volitional

mandate', there is still a 'volitional state'. But what makes this state volitional, and hence the resultant movements voluntary? James does introduce a concept of the agent's 'attending' to the idea or thought of the movement to be brought about. Indeed he claims that 'attention is the first and fundamental thing in volition' (p.568), and this 'effort of attention' is 'the essential phenomenon of will' (p.562). We might suppose that such 'attending' may characterise the volitional state which gives rise to simple voluntary movement, but this is not what James has in mind.

Although in introducing this concept of 'attending to the thought of movement', he incorporates something like a sense of agent's approval for the movement, James is adamant that there is a sense of voluntary movement which does not require this 'attending'. These instances would be the 'simplest' form of voluntary movement (simple ideo-motor action), in that they arise directly from the agent's idea or thought of movement. No conscious attention is involved in such cases because there is no conflict of ideas, hence nothing to inhibit the thought from resulting in the movement. As James puts it:

> "In all [such actions] ...the determining condition of the unhesitating and resistless sequence of the act seems to be the absence of any conflicting notion in the mind." (p.523)

To illustrate this type of action, James gives a biographical example of trying to get out of bed on a freezing morning, in a room without a fire:

> "How do we ever get up under such circumstances? ...we more often than not get up without any struggle or decision at all. We suddenly find that we have got up. ...an idea which at that lucky instant awakens no contradictory or paralyzing suggestions, and consequently produces immediately its appropriate motor effects. It was our acute consciousness of both the warmth and the cold during the period of struggle which paralyzed our activity then and kept our idea of rising in the condition of wish and not of will. The moment these inhibitory ideas ceased, the original idea exerted its effects." (pp.524-5)

Since James is disinclined to explain voluntariness in terms of the agent's 'attention to the thought', we may again be led to ask why the simple cases of voluntary movement should count as voluntary, if they result directly from the thought of the movement with no 'decision' on the part of the agent. It seems that movements may occur in spite of what the agent wants, so long as there are instances of uninhibited thoughts of movement. By concentrating on examples such as the above, James may neglect the possibility of uninhibited thoughts leading to movements contrary to what one wants, or what one 'should' want.

James does offer a response which may meet this criticism, and thereby justify viewing such movements as voluntary. He claims that

> "It is unqualifiedly true that if any thought[s] do fill the mind exclusively, such filling is consent. The thought, for that time at any rate, carries the man and his will with it." (p.568)

In this way, James would deny that agents suffer, rather than perform, such 'simple' voluntary movements.

We see then that James's theory has this two-fold

account of voluntary movement. Simple ideo-motor actions involve no fiat nor volitional mandate, but arise from the agent's uninhibited thought of his movement's sensible effects. On occasion, however, a volition proper is required. Thus,

> "the express fiat or act of mental consent to the movement comes in when the neutralization of antagonistic and inhibitory ideas is required." (p.526)

It is this 'effort of attention', that James considers 'the essential phenomenon of will' (p.562), which also, we can suppose, bears some of the traditional features of volition. Such is an act of mind, which is necessary in order that the desired movement be produced. Although, on James's account, this preceding mental act is not always required for voluntary action, he does acknowledge that 'the essential achievement of the will, in short, when it is most voluntary', is to ATTEND to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind. This so-doing is the fiat' (p.561). This 'fiat' or 'volitional mandate' is James's version of volition. Nevertheless, the detail of his account does not stop there, for he wishes to distinguish this 'act of attending' from a further aspect of the will. Thus, he writes:

> "Often ...we need a new state of effort to break down the sudden hesitation which seizes upon us, and to persevere. So that although attention is the first and fundamental thing in volition, express consent to the reality of what is attended to, is often an additional and quite distinct phenomenon involved." (p.568)

Thus, James distinguishes 'attending' to the thought of movement, from another occurrence which is a distinct 'effort of consent' to the thought attended to. James expresses the distinction as follows:

> "It is unqualifiedly true that if any thought[s] do fill the mind exclusively, such filling is consent... But it is not true that the thought need fill the mind exclusively for consent to be there; for we often consent to things whilst thinking of other things, even of hostile things; [it] is just this coexistence with the triumphant thought of other thoughts which would inhibit it but for the effort which makes it prevail. The effort to attend is therefore only a part of what the word 'will' covers; it covers also the effort to consent to something to which our attention is not quite complete." (p.568)

So there is a third aspect to the will, as James presents it. A movement may arise from the volitional state, it may also be produced by way of our attending to the thought of that movement. Nevertheless, on some occasions, an additional mental operation is required to ensure that this volitional state, plus 'attending', are adequate to produce the movement. This 'express consent to the reality of what is attended to' is 'an additional and quite distinct phenomenon' from our 'attending to the thought of the movement'.

From the details of James's account of the will, it may appear that he could hardly be further from the traditional theory of action in terms of volition. It is worthwhile contrasting his views with those of the volitionists detailed in the previous section.

The most significant difference between James and the more orthodox volitionists is that he would allow voluntary movement without an express volition. More usually, volitions are considered causally necessary for each action. Since, in this latter case volitions are taken to explain the voluntariness of the resultant movement, James has to provide an alternative account of how voluntary movement without volition, qualifies as voluntary.

We have seen that his explanation is in terms of the agent's ideas naturally leading to his movement. The state of mind which leads to such movement may even be termed 'a volitional state', though this is something of a misnomer if it is taken to imply the presence of volition. To the objection that James's non-volitional voluntary movements need not involve the agent's consent or desire for the movement in question, James replies that 'if any thoughts do fill the mind exclusively, such filling is consent. The thought, for that time at any rate, carries the man and his will with it' (p.568).

The worry with this reply is that it avoids the problem by stipulating that consent is involved when movements result from uninhibited thoughts. Why should we accept that consent to one's movements consists in one's mind being exclusively filled with the thought of such movement?

I may be told by a thug that on the count of three he will forcibly twist my arm behind my back. Anticipating this movement, which is totally against my will, my mind may be filled exclusively with the thought of my arm moving in just

the way the thug intends it to move. We would not suppose that in this state of mind, I consent to the arm movement, when the thug moves my arm, even though my only thoughts are of that very movement. Nor will it do to say that the thought must lead to the requisite movement in order for it to be a case of consent. For whether the thought ultimately leads to the movement depends not solely upon the agent, but upon contingent facts about his physiological make-up, hence this contingent relation between the thought and the movement cannot determine the agent's consent or otherwise. The agent's consent depends upon the agent himself, not upon any of the contingent physiological factors which may affect his body.

Furthermore, the concern that James's simple voluntary movements need involve no desire or consent on the part of the agent, is not alleviated by his comment (above) that the man and his will are carried with the thought. This makes it appear more like movement in spite of what the agent wishes, as opposed to movement because he wishes it.

Interestingly, there are some features in common between James's account of the will, and orthodox volitionism. In particular, when a volition is involved in action, the agent must have some conception of what he is doing. On the traditional view this is the point that volitions must have objects. For James, this is embodied in his view that in volition, the agent attends to the idea of the movement. James goes so far as to say that volition is concerned solely with such ideas of movement. Thus, 'the

terminus of the psychological process in volition, the point to which the will is directly applied, is always an idea' (p.567).

It is the job of volition to attend to thoughts of one's proposed movements, but James notes that 'it is a mere physiological incident that when the object is thus attended to, immediate motor consequences ensue' (p.561).

This view accords with Hume:

> "We tell the results of our volitions <u>by experience</u>." (Enquiry, p.69)

and Mill:

> "The causal sequence whereby volition produces its effect, is taken <u>not</u> to be a subject of consciousness... the connection between [volition and its effect] ...is a matter of experience." (Logic, p.232)

It is agreed even by James that the connection between the occurrence of a volition and of its effect, is a contingent and not a necessary relation.

A further notable parallel between James and traditional volitionists lies in the basic assumption that volitions are objects of experience. Indeed, James would accord with Locke (Essay, p.236), and Reid (Essays, p.57), that the power we call will is the act of determining things that we conceive to be in our power. And particularly, that this is a power of which we are conscious. James describes will as a state of mind which everyone knows. Yet, in

keeping with earlier writers, he concludes that there is something essentially mysterious about the overall process of willing. We find agreement that the ultimate character of what is involved in willing, cannot be expressed, though it is something we are all familiar with, from our own experience. In James's words,

> "the transition from merely considering an object as possible, to deciding or willing it to be real; the change from the fluctuating to the stable personal attitude concerning it; from the 'don't care' state of mind to that in which 'we mean business' is one of the most familiar things in life. We can partly enumerate its conditions; and we can partly trace its consequences, especially the momentous one that when the mental object is a movement of our own body, it realized itself outwardly when the mental change in question has occurred. But the change itself as a subjective phenomenon is something which we can translate into no simpler terms." (p.569)

In Locke we find that:

> "the act of mind, whose proper name is willing or volition, is a very simple act, and whosoever desires to understand what it is, will better find it by reflecting on his own mind, and observing what it does when it wills, than by any variety of articulate sounds whatsoever." (Essay, p.249)

And in Hume:

> "the will... [is] the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body... this impression is impossible to define." (Treatise, p.399)

(4) UNDERSTANDING JAMES

Having successfully extracted the full detail of

James's theory, how can we understand the significant differences in his account from that of the earlier volitionists? There are two main features to be explained. First, James allows voluntary motion without volition, while the traditional account requires volitions as explanations of voluntariness. Second, James locates two distinct mental acts which may be involved in willing, while the traditional account has only one. For James, these acts are 'attending to the idea of one's movement', which he identifies as the volition, and 'consenting to the reality of such an idea', of which he is able to say very little.

The first point to establish is why James accepts the possibility of voluntary movement without the need for volition. To understand this is to grasp the basis of James's whole approach to the nature of the will. James is attempting to develop a theory of the will based upon introspection; on the basis of the phenomenology of willing. He is taking literally the words of Locke (quoted above), that to understand what goes on when we will we had best 'reflect on our own minds' and observe what happens on such occasions. Like the earlier volition theorists, James supposed that volitions are objects of experience. It is little wonder then that in trying to explain what happens in most cases of voluntary movement, he sees no need for an 'express fiat' or 'volitional mandate'. The reason volition makes no appearance on his account is that we are not normally conscious of anything we would call volition when we perform such actions. Thus James notes that

> "Whenever movement follows unhesitatingly and immediately the notion of it in the mind, we have ideo-motor action. We are then aware of nothing between the conception and the execution." (p.522)

Since volition was a traditional concept for understanding the will, James may have felt bound to locate such a feature. But it is introduced at a 'higher level' than ordinary voluntary movement, and is not considered essential for voluntariness. At this 'level', James thought that we could be conscious of something volition-like. Hence, he suggests that:

> "An anticipatory image of the sensorial consequences of a movement plus (on some occasions) the fiat that these consequences shall become actual, is the only psychic state which introspection lets us discern as the forerunner of our voluntary state." (p.5Ø1; my emphasis)

James identifies volition with what happens when we are hesitant about action; a feature additional to the mere thought of the movement is required; we must attend to the thought of what we want to do. This attending is an act of mind, and since we are all familiar with having to concentrate on what we are doing in order to get it done, we can relate from 'introspective experience', to this mental act which James calls a fiat, or volitional mandate.

The third feature of James's theory also fits with his introspective approach. His need for this further mental act is grounded in introspection:

> "Often when an object has gained our attention exclusively, and its motor results are just on the

> point of setting in, it seems as if the sense of their imminent irrevocability were enough of itself to start up the inhibitory ideas and to make us pause. Then we need a new stroke of effort to break down the sudden hesitation which seizes upon us, and to persevere. So that, although attention is the first and fundamental thing in volition, express consent to the reality of what is attended to is often an additional and quite distinct phenomenon." (p.568)

But why should such hesitation require a new stroke of effort, an effort of a different kind, rather than a repetition of the earlier effort; the volitional mandate?

Presumably, James feels that attending to the thought of one's movement is not always sufficient to produce that movement, in which case, attending twice would be no more successful than attending only once. What is required is a different mental 'push' to carry through the movement. Of course, James can say little about this additional phenomenon. He cannot call it a volition because he has already played that card, and traditionally there is no precedent for two types of volition. Ironically, he is left in the familiar volitionist position of being unable to say anything more about the nature of this feature. Although, 'the reader's own consciousness tells him of course just what these words ...denote' (p.568).

It should be evident at this stage that James's introspective approach to the analysis of action, combined with his apparently prior commitment to the existence of volition, leads to a theory that is flawed in two important respects. Firstly, he is unable to provide an adequate account of the voluntariness of simple ideo-motor actions,

because there is no introspective ground for supposing the presence of volition in such cases.

Furthermore, his introspection leads to a theory which is cumbersome and uneconomical, since he is compelled to introduce 'significant' acts of mind to explain how and what we feel under different circumstances in action.

Such difficulties as we find in James's account can be overcome if we drop the presumption that volition is introspectible. Thereby its absence from consciousness in simple cases of action is to be expected, likewise its absence from every other instance of action. After all, why should we accept that what we are subjectively conscious of in different action-situations, is any accurate indication of the nature of action? Certainly, the prime function of volition is to explain the nature of action; to explain how movements come to be voluntary. The need for such a device is evidenced by the inadequacy of James's account of the voluntariness of simple ideo-motor actions. But this does not commit us to volition as a subject of consciousness. Still, it may be asked why we should suppose that volitions exist if we cannot be aware of them. The obvious answer is that we must posit their existence because we need them to explain what we take to be the case, viz. that there is a fundamental difference between actions, those movements that are in our power, and non-actions, which occur regardless of our mental attitudes.

We can still suppose that what we experience when we act may be explained psychologically, but there is no reason

to suppose that such explanations are all that can be offered by way of analysis of action. Certainly, James's account is evidence to the contrary.

In the following chapter, we shall meet Prichard's attempts to put the concept of volition on a surer footing.

CHAPTER 4 : PRICHARD ON ACTION AND VOLITION

(1) ARGUING FOR VOLITION

Even after reading the views of James, Reid, Hume and others, it may not be obvious that volitions are objects with which we are all familiar. Despite the self-assurance of such writers that volitions are part of our everyday experience, one might be led to ask why we should believe in the existence of volitions at all. Certainly, if there is any room for doubting their reality it will not suffice to be told that we are all familiar with volitions.

Curiously, none of the writers thus far discussed offers argument to substantiate the view that volitions exist, let alone underlie all our actions. They appear content to commit themselves to volition and thereby treat its occurrence as undisputed fact. Presumably, they could see little reason for doubting the reality of volition, although the justification for such a belief is not immediately evident.

James's approach may have held more promise for securing a ground for the concept of volition. After all, if we are all familiar with such occurrences then surely introspection is the way to verify their existence. Yet, James's account helps little in establishing that volitions exist. If anything, James is uncertain of the precise nature that such a creature should have, and ends up with a complicated, convoluted and clearly unorthodox account of

the part volitions play in action.

There is little doubt that James's introspective abilities are as good as anyone elses, so we can only suppose that introspection is of no practical aid in isolating volitions. The nature and existence of volitions, would, one assumes, be far less contentious if we were indeed all conscious of such a feature. Although there is room to argue that the lack of concensus on volition indicates that many fail to appreciate what they are actually aware of, more plausibly, we might suppose that we are not aware of volitions at all.

On this point, Melden aptly notes that

> "unless I can recognise... [volition] by having some description in mind that applies to such acts and only to these, it is at best a simple begging of the question to insist that all of us really understand what is being referred to; in fact it is an implied charge of dishonesty directed at those who refuse to give their assent." (Melden, 1961:47)

Evidently then, what is required is argument rather than assumptions that volitions exist and have a role to play in action.

An argument to this effect can be gleaned from the writings of H.A. Prichard, who in many respects advocated an orthodox volitionism. In particular, Prichard's volitionism is orthodox in that, unlike James, he construes volition as a ground for voluntary movement. Thus, for Prichard, 'willing' is something in which we all indulge whenever we

perform an action. Furthermore, like the earlier volition theorists, Prichard regarded volition as a part of common experience. He describes willing as 'an activity of whose nature we are dimly aware in doing the action and of which we can become more clearly aware by reflecting on it' (Prichard, 1969b:189). In addition, 'while we know the general character of that to which we refer when we use the word 'willing', this character is sui generis and so incapable of being defined, i.e., of having its nature expressed in terms of the nature of other things' (op. cit., p.189). These Prichardian views are clearly reminiscent of Locke, Hume and Reid (See Chapter 3, Section (1)).

From many of Prichard's comments it appears that he does not feel obliged to prove the existence of volitions. Thus, he remarks, that when we think of ourselves as having done some action, we are thinking of ourselves as having performed an activity of some kind, and 'it almost goes without saying, a mental activity of a certain kind...' (p.189). Prichard supports this remark with further comment:

> "that we are aware of its special nature is shown by our unhesitatingly distinguishing it from other special mental activities such as thinking, wondering, and imagining." (p.189)

While we may unhesitatingly accord that thinking, wondering and imagining do not fit the role that is purportedly played by volition (or willing), it is not so evident as Prichard suggests, that willing is an activity on a par with these familiar 'mental' pastimes.

We may be surprised then to find Prichard drawing the conclusion that 'where we think of ourselves as having done a certain action, the kind of activity of which we are thinking is that of willing.' This may surprise us on two counts. Firstly, that the existence of willing be introduced as a conclusion, and secondly, that he should conclude not merely that willing takes place when we act, but that our acting consists in this willing.

In the present chapter, I shall go into the detail of Prichard's argument to see why he advocates the existence of volition, and also why he adopts the unorthodox view that willings are the only actions we perform.

The primary source for Prichard's views is his article 'Acting, willing, desiring', in which he presents ideas developed from his earlier article 'Duty and ignorance of fact'. From the former we can discern the following main theses:

(1) The thing meant by an action is an activity.

(2) The agent's activity does not consist in causing a change, nor in bringing something about.

(3) The agent's activity consists in willing.

(4) To act is really to will something.

These represent the main steps in Prichard's argument. For convenience of reference, I shall term them theses (1) - (4)

respectively.

Thesis (1) : The thing meant by an action is an activity.

Prichard offers little to clarify this view. He claims that it is true 'whether we speak of a man's action in moving his hand, or of a body's action such as that of the heart in pumping the blood, or that of one electron in repelling another' (p.188). Presumably, what he has in mind is that in every such case, the initial change (activity) is required in order to produce the result which is the hand movement, the heart beat, or repelling of an electron. This is underlined by his comment that in acting, we cause something (op. cit.).

Support for thesis (1) comes from the causal analysis of action which Prichard discusses in 'Duty and ignorance of fact'. Here he considers action as 'bringing something about':

> "we have in the end to allow that we mean by ['an action' or 'doing something'] ...originating, causing, or bringing about the existence of something, viz. some new state of an existing thing or substance, or more shortly, causing a change of state of some existing thing." (Prichard,1969a:19)
> "by 'moving our hand' we mean causing a change of place of our hand; by 'posting a letter' we mean bringing about that a letter is in pillar-box; and so on." (loc. cit.)

Since doing an action is thus conceived of as 'bringing something about' it is easy to see why it should be analysed in terms of an activity. When the heart pumps blood, or an

electron is repelled, something is brought about, and this is to be explained in terms of some activity which does the bringing about, or is responsible for the resultant change. Thus, logically, whenever some change C is brought about, there must have been some activity A, the occurrence of which brings about, and thereby explains the change C.

Since action is to be analysed on a par with such changes, Prichard naturally concludes that whenever someone acts, e.g., moves his arm, doing this action must consist in some activity which has the agent's arm movement as an effect. So, it is on the basis of this causal analysis of action as the bringing about of some change that Prichard can derive the thesis that to act is to perform an activity.

Thesis (2) : The agent's activity does not consist in causing a change nor in bringing about an effect.

Prichard's main argument for this view is found in 'Acting, willing, desiring', where he asks, 'is there such an activity as originating or causing a change in something else?' (p.188). He concludes that there is no such activity on the grounds that the activity presupposed in any instance of causing or originating must be distinct from the causing or originating. Thus, neither a man's activity in moving his hand, nor the sun's activity in attracting the earth is nor consists in causing the respective movement. Although it may not be clear, what underlies Prichard's argument are the distinctions between cause, causing, and effect. Thus, we would say that when the earth is attracted by the sun, the

effect is the earth's movement toward the sun. The cause is something to do with the sun; it is something the sun does, presumably associated with its mass, that is cause of the earth's movement. Still, this cause, which Prichard would call the activity, is not identical to the causing of the earth's movement. The causing, originating, or bringing about embodies both cause and effect. There is no instance of the sun causing the earth to move, unless the sun has 'acted' so as to result in some earthly movement. And since the only candidate for 'activity' is the cause in such a sequence, and since this is clearly not the same as the causing, Prichard's point is established. The activity in any instance of action is not the originating or causing of the change in question.

From such considerations it follows that the activity will be identified with whatever is the cause in a sequence describable as the originating, causing, or bringing about of some change. Hence, in Prichard's example, the agent's activity when he performs the action of moving his hand, is whatever the agent does to produce the hand movement. In other words, what the agent does, is the cause of his movement. The next question that arises is how Prichard concludes that this activity (the cause in action) is to be identified as 'willing'.

(2) AGENT'S ACTIVITY

Thesis (3) : The agent's activity consists in willing.

Clearly, this is a major progression in Prichard's argument and as such it is far more contentious and faces greater obstacles than the earlier theses. The main consideration offered by Prichard relies on a distinction which he draws between direct and indirect actions:

> "we should distinguish those actions in doing which we originated some new state directly from those in which we did this only indirectly, i.e. by originating directly some other state by originating which we indirectly originated the final state." (op. cit, p.187)

Prichard cites moving or turning one's head as an example of direct action. Curing a toothache by taking aspirin, and killing someone by exploding a charge underneath him, are his examples of indirect action. The latter variety is the easier to grasp since we are familiar with doing one thing as a means to another, whether it be swallowing aspirin to relieve pain, or scolding a child to make him behave. Prichard admits that direct action is less easily assimilated. On the face of it, moving one's head, or raising one's arm are actions we perform directly; there are no obvious deeds which one executes in order to move one's head or raise one's arm. At the same time, moving one's body is just the sort of action one would perform in order to bring about actions which are thereby reasonably seen as indirect. Imagine taking aspirin, curing a toothache, improving a child's behaviour, or killing a friend, without moving some part of one's body as a means to such an end. Yet, according to Prichard, if challenged, we should have to allow that even in these instances cited as direct actions,

'we did not originate directly what the instances suggest that we did, since what we did originate directly must have been some new state or states of our nerve cells, of which we are ignorant' (p.187).

The suggestion that one does not directly act in executing a bodily movement may not give immediate cause for concern. We can simply deem such actions indirect, like curing a pain, or killing a friend. But we must remember that not all actions can be indirect, for such actions can only be performed if there is some direct action which is done as a means to the indirect. In Prichard's words,

> "we should insist that in doing any action we must have originated something directly, since otherwise we could not originate anything indirectly." (loc. cit.)

So, if we are content to describe our voluntary movements as indirect actions we are committed to supposing that we perform such movements by doing something else, where this other deed merits the title of 'direct action'.

On the defensive, we might ask Prichard why our voluntary bodily movements should not qualify as direct actions. His answer, already mentioned, is that we must admit that in these circumstances what we originate directly is something other than such movements. This something is performed as a means to the execution of our voluntary movements. As candidate for what we do directly in such instances, Prichard cites 'some new state or states of our nerve-cells', but why should we consider this direct action?

Prichard's reasons are clear. In order to move one's limbs or any other part of one's body, it is necessary that changes take place within the body itself. Consequently, if one is to move one's limbs then one must bring about the internal bodily changes necessary for this movement. It would seem to follow therefore, since I must affect such internal bodily changes in order to move my body, that my voluntary bodily movements cannot be direct actions. Instead, my affecting the necessary internal changes will qualify as direct. Unless, that is, there is some earlier change which must be brought about in order to bring about these later internal changes necessary for bodily movements.

Let us grant for the moment that Prichard is able to establish that there are such direct actions, of whose precise nature we are probably ignorant. How does this assist his thesis that whenever we act our activity consists in willing?

For the next step in Prichard's progression we must return to 'Duty and ignorance of fact', where he points out that where we think of some past action of ours as indirect, that is, as one in which we indirectly brought about some particular thing, e.g. curing someone's illness,

> "we think it fair to ask ' <u>How</u> did we do the action?' We take the question to have the intelligible meaning: 'What was that by the direct production of which we indirectly produced what we did?'; and we can give some sort of answer. But we can also ask a question verbally similar, where we think of some past action as one in which we directly brought about something, where e.g. I think of myself as having moved my hand... In such a case, of course, the question cannot be of the

> same kind, because ex hypothesi I am not thinking of the action as one in which I caused some particular thing by causing something else, so I cannot be asking: 'By directly causing what did I cause what I did?' The legitimate question is: 'What was the activity by performing which I caused my hand to move?" (p.32)

By this line of argument Prichard suggests that whenever we execute a direct action we do so by performing some activity which brings it about. This may seem paradoxical. After all, how can we suppose that my raising my arm is a direct action if I must perform some other activity in order to raise my arm? Does this not indicate that this putative direct action of arm raising is really indirect?

Here it is easy to misunderstand Prichard's conception of direct action. We must bear in mind that he has analysed action as bringing about some change. This means that, while for indirect action such an action is the result of a bringing about, i.e. of another action, direct action is not the result of any other bringing about. Nevertheless, direct action is still a bringing about. This means that raising one's arm, if construed as direct, will be the bringing about of one's arm rising. Hence, it is required by this analysis of action that even direct action be construed as involving an activity which brings about some change. It is for this reason that Prichard talks of performing an activity in order to bring about a direct action. Despite initial appearances to the contrary, this does no violence to the directness of such an action.

Granted that the execution of a direct action involves

the performance of an activity in order to bring about some change, we are naturally led to inquire after the nature of this activity. Not surprisingly, Prichard has an answer to this query:

> "an answer would be 'willing the existence of the movement." (p.32)

This would be the case where we regard moving one's hand as a direct action, but we have seen that Prichard acknowledges that even in such instances we have to allow that we did not directly originate what the instances suggest that we did. (p.187) Perhaps we should regard appropriate internal bodily changes as direct actions, rather than our voluntary bodily movements. Would this affect Prichard's resort to willing as the activity involved in direct action?

Apparently Prichard is not over concerned with deciding where to draw the line which demarcates direct from indirect actions. What is important for his purposes is the principle that 'in doing any action we must have originated <u>something</u> directly' (p.187). This principle, combined with the analysis of action as performing an activity, results in the need to locate an activity which is fundamental to direct action. Clearly, even if we draw the line of direct action at the level of bodily movements, the required activity must be more fundamental than the movements which are its results. Yet, if we make this assumption, Prichard faces the possible objection that the activity in direct action is not willing, but the internal bodily activity necessary for the bodily movements which we are considering to be direct

actions.

The problem is that if we regard voluntary bodily movements as direct actions then, following Prichard, we must suppose there to be some activity essential to these actions, which brings about or results in these bodily movements. Furthermore, since these direct actions are of the level of overt movements it should follow that the related activity will be of a different order from such movements. This gives some plausibility to the view that internal bodily changes necessary for our voluntary bodily movements should be construed as the activity in question. Certainly this may accord with Prichard's contention that 'when we think of ourselves as having moved our hand, we are thinking of ourselves as having performed an activity of a certain kind... an activity of whose nature we are dimly aware in doing the action and of which we can become more clearly aware by reflecting on it' (p.189).

In the face of such an alternative we may suppose that it does not 'go without saying' that the activity performed is 'a <u>mental</u> activity of a certain kind', viz. willing. Nevertheless, there are difficulties involved in the view that this activity consists in the internal bodily changes necessary for our voluntary movements. We must admit that it is primae facie implausible to place the locus of action at the level say, of muscular contractions. Certainly, this would make it more appropriate to say 'My muscles raised my arm' rather than 'I raised my arm', but this would not accord with what we take ourselves to mean by 'I raise my

arm'.

Additionally, there is a crucial objection to construing these internal changes as our activity in direct action. It is accepted that such changes are necessary for our bodily movements, but not only for these movements when we execute an action. Thus, if my arm is raised in an instance which is not an action, the same internal changes must occur if my arm is to rise. This means that the locus of action cannot lie with such internal changes for their occurrence or non-occurrence cannot serve to distinguish genuine cases of voluntary movement from mere bodily movements (non-actions). So we must find some alternative to fit Prichard's scheme, which can be considered an activity necessary for instances of action, and only instances of action. Returning to Prichard's way of posing the problem, the question may be put: 'What was the activity by performing which I caused my hand to move?'

While Prichard is quick to adopt the view that this activity is the mental activity of willing, we should note that he has no logically tight move to this conclusion. He makes no obviously valid deduction to the view that the activity in question is that of willing. Indeed, in response to the question 'What was the activity by performing which I caused my hand to move?' he notes that ' an answer would be 'Willing the existence of the movement'' (p.32; my emphasis). The most that can be said for Prichard's solution is that it looks like an apposite answer to the problem question, but in the absence of any viable alternative his

response should not be undervalued. Certainly, willing would constitute an activity, and it would not bear the same relation to my arm movement in case this movement was non-actional. Prichard would thereby analyse 'I raise my arm' as 'I willed the occurrence of my arm rising, which willing resulted in my arm rising.' Which is to say that my arm raised because I willed it to rise. Prima facie at least, this does no violence to our ordinary conception of what is involved in doing such an action. So, Prichard's answer fits the bill, and what is more it has no obvious rival. This makes it unreasonable not to accept the plausibility of thesis (3), viz. the activity we perform whenever we do an action, is that of willing.

We have seen that in order to substantiate thesis (3), Prichard relies on the idea that we can sensibly ask of our voluntary movements, how they were performed. Construing these voluntary movements as direct implies that there is no other action by doing which one brings about one's movements. Consequently, the sense which Prichard attributes to the above question is 'by performing which activity does one cause such movements?' This, in turn, justifies our seeking an activity which is logically prior to the movement.

(3) MELDEN AGAINST PRICHARD

In "Free Action", Melden argues that the question form 'How did one do X?' cannot be appropriately applied to voluntary movements. His reason for this view is that when

one, for example, raises one's arm, one does not do so 'by performing another doing which has the motion of one's arm as effect, one simply raises one's arm' (Melden, 1961:65). This is apparently in direct opposition to Prichard's view that 'what I called 'moving my hand'... consisted in a particular activity of another sort of which the change of place of my hand was an effect' (p.32-33).

It is not easy to pinpoint the precise conflict between Melden and Prichard on this issue. Thus, for example, Melden comments that 'I raise my arm not by doing anything else at all. I simply exercise my primitive ability to raise my arm' (op. cit., p.39). But if this encapsulates his point of view he may yet accord with Prichard. While Prichard maintains that in raising one's arm there is some activity one performs that results in the arm raising, he would accept that raising one's arm is a primitive ability. To describe raising one's arm thus is not to deny the Prichardian thesis of activity-causing-movement, rather it is to reiterate the view that voluntary movements are direct actions, which in turn is to say that in performing such an action, there is no other action by means of which one performs the voluntary movement. This is what Melden is at pains to emphasise when he notes that 'when I move my arm there is no Y that I do by means of which this X (moving my arm) is done.' (p.39) So long as X is construed as the agent's action (voluntary movement) this merely restates Prichard's characterisation of direct action. The immediate appearance of conflict between Melden and Prichard arises from the claim that when I perform a direct action I perform some activity which

results in my movement. Thus, when I move my arm, there is some Y that I do whereby this X (my arm movement) is produced. We might term this the Prichardian thesis P.

It is evident both to Prichard and Melden that my action of raising my arm is not something I do by doing something else. Nevertheless, it will not do to treat the conflict between the two as merely apparent, for Melden does specifically deny P. Thus, he states categorically that

> "no attempt to bridge the gap between the physiological happening described as the movement of one's arm and the action described as moving one's arm by any device such as the introduction of causes, mental or physiological will do. One does not move one's arm by performing another doing which has the motion of one's arm as effect- one simply raises one's arm." (Melden, 1961:65)

Melden's procedure for arguing against the application of the question form 'how does one do X?' to voluntary movements is to discount two likely responses to this query. Firstly, he vehemently denies that one raises one's arm by contracting certain muscles. This is not a view with which Prichard would be associated, though he would agree that the muscle contractions are causally necessary for the bodily movement. Thereafter, Melden argues that one cannot raise one's arm by willing, because the concept of volition does not coherently permit such a view. So, the Prichardian approach is rejected because of the 'logical incoherence involved in the doctrine of acts of volition' (p.52). Thus, Melden's case for rejecting Prichard's thesis P, depends upon criticisms forwarded against the concept of volition

itself. Since the viability and coherence of volition is to be considered in detail in later chapters, we shall have occasion then to discuss Melden's arguments (see Chapters 5 and 9).

While Melden may be in part justified in his view that 'philosophical talk about acts of volition involves a mare's nest of confusions' (p.55), we need not suppose that these are confusions that cannot be cleared up. So, in lieu of our detailed discussion of the nature of volition, we can set aside Melden's misgivings over Prichard's analysis of action, and return again to Prichard.

Before passing on to Prichard's thesis (4), we might ask whether there are likely to be any further objections to his argument thus far. To review: we have considered how he arrives at three theses, viz. (1) The thing meant by an action is an activity; (2) The agent's activity does not consist in causing some change; and (3) The agent's activity consists in willing.

Thesis (1) is derived from the causal analysis of action, via the idea that to do an action is to bring something about, or cause some change. Like thesis (1), thesis (2) follows from Prichard's analysis of what it is to bring something about or cause some change. Interestingly, thesis (3) is not derived with such strict logic. By applying the analysis of action to direct actions Prichard shows that in such cases there must be some activity of the agent which is logically basic even to action we think of as direct. Thereupon, in elucidation of what such activity

might be, he suggests willing. It is largely the absence of any other likely candidate that gives credence to Prichard's suggestion. Apparently, some activity must 'underlie' every instance of action, and must be somehow fundamental to such instances. This activity will in fact constitute the locus of action, for it will distinguish actions from all other occurrences. This is the role traditionally played by the concept of volition. It is not surprising then, that there is no obvious opponent to fill the role.

From this, it appears that the only scope for doubting Prichard's position is either to deny the causal analysis of action as bringing about, and thence deny Prichard's notion of activity, or to suggest an alternative answer to his question: 'what was the activity by performing which I caused my hand to move?' If one gets so far as to pose this question, it is very difficult to conceive of a more apposite response than Prichard's own. Can we then find cause to doubt the Prichardian analysis of action?

In a discussion of Prichard's theory of action (Aune, 1974), Bruce Aune anticipates an objection from those who adhere to a concept of 'agent-causation'. Such adherents will refuse to accept the analysis of 'doing an action' in terms of an activity of the agent bringing about some change, for this would be simply event-causation, to which <u>inanimate</u> objects are susceptible. Yet if we construe 'doing an action' other than in the sense of event-causation we must suppose that the change is brought about not by some activity of the agent, but, in some irreducible sense, by

the agent himself.

Aune pinpoints the difficulty with this approach:

> "to say that John... caused his hand to move... is not to say that he was the irreducible cause of his hand's motion; if he were, then, since he existed yesterday, his hand should have moved the same way yesterday too. After all, if A is the irreducible cause of B, then whenever we have A, we should have B as well. Clearly, if John did move his hand at a certain time, then there must have been something about him at the time that accounts for the occurrence then, of his hand's movement. In this respect the case of John does not differ from that in which we say that an empty car knocked over a lamppost: the car, like the man, must 'do' something (in this case, strike the post) that causes the result to occur." (p.101)

Prichard's contention that there is some activity present in every case of bringing about, whether by an agent, an electron, or the sun, is nothing more than a logical consequence of our notion of causation. Clearly, the idea that agents are irreducible causes when they act, is not a serious rival as an analysis of agent's bringing things about. Event-causality, with its activity requirement is far more credible; which leaves us in a position to consider Prichard's fourth thesis.

Thesis (4) : To act is really to will something.

(4) PRICHARD'S CONCLUSION

Before discussing how this thesis is arrived at, it is worth noting the unusual implications of this view. If we suppose, with Prichard, that to do an action is to will something, this means that familiar examples of what we

ordinarily regard as actions, such as raising one's arm, or signalling a turn, turn out not to be actions at all. In fact, we are left with the view that the only actions we perform occur inside ourselves, for willing is not something external to the agent. Prichard does acknowledge the unusual content of this view. He envisages cases where an agent performs an activity of willing, without this willing causing any physical change, and notes that 'in such cases our activity would not ordinarily be called an action' (p.193). Although the oddity of Prichard's view is most evident when we think of such examples of willing with no physical results, Prichard adds that such activity is 'of the same sort as what we ordinarily call and think of as an action' (loc. cit.). Presumably this is his way of saying that his analysis of doing an action as willing some change, is what we really mean by acting, for it certainly is not true that we ordinarily think of actions as things agents do in their heads. Prichard would reply that the way in which we ordinarily refer to actions takes account of the effects that we suppose are produced by the activity of willing. Thus he notes that

> "what I called moving my hand really consisted in setting myself [willing] to move it, and that I referred to this activity as moving my hand because I thought it had a change of place of my hand as an effect." (p.32)

In this way Prichard may explain the fact that we find his account a little peculiar. It is simply that we tend to refer to our actions in terms of the effects of our activity

of willing, and so are apt not to appreciate that the willing is the essential ingredient.

One might seek to defend Prichard on this matter. It might be said that what we ordinarily think of as actions are not totally disqualified from being actions on Prichard's scheme. They will still be actions of a sort. Thus, posting a letter, scolding a child, and raising one's arm would be indirect actions. And since indirect actions are dependent upon the stricter sense of direct action, this is the sense in which the familiar actions are not actions, they are simply not direct actions.

The trouble with this defence is that it does not accord with Prichard's views. If he were to say that our familiar actions were simply not direct actions, and this is all that is meant by saying that willing is action, this would imply that willing is direct action; but Prichard does not believe this to be the case. Willing is not itself direct action, rather it is the activity one performs in doing an action directly. Thus, Prichard supposes that voluntary bodily movements are direct. Apparently, in claiming that to act is really to will something he denies the status of action to all except willings; thereby, he excludes both direct and indirect actions.

One strange implication of these facts is that Prichard denies his initial position that things done directly or indirectly are still actions. Furthermore, what he now wishes to call action, namely, willing, does not figure at all in the scheme of direct and indirect actions, which

leaves one wondering how it can be legitimately classed as action. We shall have occasion to raise this query again later.

Returning for the present to the detail of Prichard's thesis (4), we can see that it is related in important respects to what has gone before. In fact, thesis (4) can be seen as a conclusion which follows from Prichard's earlier theses (1) and (3). Thus, given that the thing meant by an action is an activity (thesis (1)), and that the agent's activity consists in willing (thesis (3)), there can be no denying the conclusion that the agent's action consists in willing (thesis (4)). This also appears to match Prichard's method of arriving at the view expressed in this last thesis. In consequence, any misgivings we have with thesis (4) must reflect on the details of theses (1) and (3).

I confess to finding Prichard's thesis (4) intuitively implausible and would suggest that his strange view arises from his failure to note an equivocation in connection with thesis (1). Let us think again about the propriety of the first thesis.

In particular, it is not clear to me how Prichard establishes that the agent's activity in performing an action, <u>is</u> his action. Does he have any grounds for asserting such an identity?

From our discussion of thesis (1) we have seen that Prichard supports this view by reference to the causal analysis of action. Thus, considering action as causing some

change, or bringing something about, he is able to deduce that in acting (causing a change; bringing something about) there must be some activity of the agent which results in the change or the thing brought about. This is derived from the nature of 'bringing something about', or of 'causing a change', such that whenever some change C is brought about (caused), there must be some activity A, which does the bringing about (causes), and is thus responsible for the resultant change.

It is with this in mind that Prichard concludes that 'unquestionably the thing meant by 'an action' is an activity', for he notes that 'this is so whether we speak of a man's action in moving his hand, or of a body's action such as that of the heart in pumping the blood, or that of one electron in repelling another' (p.188).

It does seem to follow from Prichard's analysis of action, that, as he puts it, 'When, e.g., we think of ourselves as having moved our hand, we are thinking of ourselves as having performed an activity of a certain kind...' (p.189). But is it clear that this conclusion is equivalent to thesis (1), viz., that the thing meant by an action is an activity? I would suggest that there is reason for thinking not.

To see this we must pay close attention to the analysis of action in terms of 'bringing something about' or 'causing some change'. From this analysis it follows that in action there is some activity performed by the agent. But it cannot be concluded that the agent's action simply <u>is</u> this

activity.

When I raise my arm, I perform an action. My action is that of raising my arm. I describe my action thus, because it involved my arm rising. My raising my arm must 'include' this arm rising, otherwise it would be simply false to say that I raised my arm. Just as one cannot make an omelette without eggs, so one cannot raise an arm without an arm rising. Yet from Prichard's analysis of action we must accept that in doing such an action as raising my arm, I perform some activity. Clearly, this activity does not 'include' the arm rising. Since the activity I perform cannot 'include' this arm rising, it follows that my action is not identical with my activity.

In response, it will not do to say that while my action of raising my arm is not identical with my activity, yet the activity is fundamental to the action of arm raising, hence, since I cannot raise my arm without performing this activity of willing, this activity is the more fundamental action. The trouble with this is that we have no reason from Prichard's analysis, to treat this activity as an action. Furthermore, we arrive at the existence of such an activity on the assumption that what we analysed was itself an action. So, at best, this activity can be a component of one's action. How can it qualify as action in its own right?

This argument could be put in another way. According to the analysis of action, the relation of the agent's activity to his arm's rising is that of cause to effect. Given that the requisite activity takes place, it is a matter of

(contingent) causal necessity that the arm rise. Yet, from the description of the action as raising one's arm, given the occurrence of this action, it is a matter of logical necessity that the arm rise. Indeed, by equating the agent's action with his activity Prichard would be left with the oddity that the agent could 'raise his arm', in the sense of activity, without his arm rising.

A resolution of these difficulties may be sought by noting, with Bruce Aune, that verbs have different meanings in their transitive and intransitive uses. Thus:

> "In 'Y's hand moves'... [the verb] connotes a motion of Y's hand, but in 'X moves Y's hand' it alludes to an event or activity that causes Y's hand to move. Prichard's contention is that when 'moves' connotes an action, it is used in the latter sense: it means 'does something that causes a movement'." (op. cit., p.99)

Applying this to raising one's arm, Prichard may say that 'raising' means 'does something that causes a rising'. But does this entitle him to identify the agent's action of raising his arm with the activity in question? So long as the agent's activity is construed as that of producing a particular effect, such as an arm rising, this seems appropriate. After all, if my activity is producing the effect of my arm rising, then it follows (logically) that my arm must rise. Hence, the logic of the agent's activity thus construed, matches that of the action described as raising his arm. This identification of activity with action looks promising.

The only trouble with this interpretation is that it is

not the view Prichard adopts. He is not prepared to describe producing an effect (causing or bringing about some change) as an activity. Thus,

> "though we think that some man in moving his hand, or that the sun in attracting the earth, causes a certain movement, we do not think that the man's or the sun's activity <u>is</u> or <u>consists in</u> causing the movement." (p.188)

For Prichard the agent's activity is not his causing or bringing something about, his activity is whatever he does that causes or brings about some effect. The problem is that Prichard himself seems prepared to describe the agent's action as that of bringing about some effect. Thus, he admits that a man in moving his hand causes a certain movement (p.188). Indeed, it is this initial stance that enables him to conclude that in acting one performs an activity. Significantly, it should also follow from this analysis that the activity one performs in doing an action is <u>not</u> identical to the action one performs. Rather it is a component of one's action. The action consists in bringing about some effect by means of such an activity; from this we cannot conclude that the action <u>is</u> this activity. It follows therefore, that Prichard is misled in his identification of agent's action with his activity. Though it may be true that bringing about or causing some change is not an activity, one should conclude from this that one's action are <u>not</u> one's activities. While on the face of it this may sound paradoxical, it is not problematic if properly understood.

Before discarding thesis (1), and thereby thesis (4),

we might ask whether there is any other reason why Prichard should believe that the thing meant by an action is an activity. This is difficult to answer from a consideration of Prichard's writings, since he does not discuss the issue in any detail. On this point Aune is also restrained:

> "I cannot say exactly what Prichard meant by the word 'activity', though he no doubt restricted its application to events and occurrences that, in contrast to what might be called 'passivities', are regarded as causes rather than effects." (op. cit., p.98)

This accords with Prichard's comments that an obligation must be an obligation to be <u>active</u> as opposed to be <u>affected</u> (p.31). But why suppose that actions <u>are</u> such activities? As we have seen, it is one thing to say that in acting one must be active (perform some activity), and another thing entirely to say that to act simply <u>is</u> to perform some activity.

Perhaps a rationale for Prichard's view can be sought in the idea that it is only in his activity that the agent is truly active. Only here is he in control; after all, the rest is happenstance or causal upshot of his activity. We might suppose therefore that it is only at the level of one's activity that agency is exercised. Here alone is the domain of agent's control. Would this justify our treating the agent's activity as the 'genuine' action?

Certainly, it appears that only at the level of willing (activity) can one be sure of doing what one wants to do. Beyond this activity, the agent has no influence over what

happens. Whether his body moves, or his arrow hits the bull's-eye is dependent upon causal vagaries outside of his control. Even so, is it plausible to construe the agent's activity as under his control? There may be a tendency to equate what the agent can do at will, with what he can control, but the agent's activity is not something that he can do 'at will'. Although presumably according with his desires, aims, and intentions, the agent's volition is not something over which he has control in this sense. It is not something he can do if he wills, for he cannot will to will. Such descriptions apply to capacities beyond the level of will. Thus, one can have more or less control over the direction in which one's arrow flies when shot from our bow, and have influence over the degree of movement in one's arm when one raises it. But it only makes sense to talk of control or influence where this can be a matter of degree. It is only where there is need to take account of vagaries such as external causal influences, that we can talk of exercising control over what happens. Thus, one can have control over firing one's arrow only if there is some tendency, attributable to influences outside of our will, to miss one's target. Yet at the level of one's activity of willing, one cannot be more or less successful or accurate, hence, willing (this activity) is not something one controls. This is not the domain of the agent's ability to influence events, rather, this domain covers the outcome of such activity, and concerns one's ability to make what one produces accord with one's wishes. So, Prichard's wish to equate action with activity cannot gain support from such a

view.

What then are the lessons that we can learn from Prichard's account of action? The main points are Prichard's causal analysis of action as bringing about, which entails that in doing an action one performs an activity whereby some change or effect is produced. Most significant of all is that this account gives us reason to believe in volition, for willing is the obvious candidate for the activity one performs in doing an action.

It is important to stress that Prichard has not, strictly speaking, given us an argument to prove the existence of volition, Rather, he gives us reason to suppose that volitions (willings) occur, and underlie all our actions. This is important, because if, as I shall argue, volitions are not items of common experience but theoretical postulates, the most that can be achieved by argument is to render such postulation reasonable.

CHAPTER 5 : VOLITIONS AS ACTIONS

(1) ACTS OF VOLITION

Although considerations from Prichard's analysis of action make it reasonable to posit volition as fundamental to action, there remain queries as to the precise nature of volition. Already, we have had occasion to challenge the traditional view that volition is a conscious introspectible element in action. In supposing it essential to action, puzzles arise as to the status of volition; whether volition is itself action, and the relation of volition to familiar examples of action; in particular, whether actions are events caused by volition. It is time to delve deeper into these issues, since each proves problematic for orthodox volitionism.

The first trouble with volition is that it is represented as being an executive act. It is what we do initially when we want to do something else. So, if we are to raise an arm, open a door or sink a submarine, these actions require that we first will to bring about such consequences.

According to Ryle:

> "Volitions have been postulated as special acts, or operations, 'in the mind', by means of which a mind gets its ideas translated into facts. I think of some state of affairs which I wish to come into existence in the physical world, but, as my thinking and wishing are unexecutive, they require the mediation of a further executive mental

> process. So I perform a volition which somehow puts my muscles into action." (Ryle, 1949:62)

This accurately represents Prichard's account of the will:

> "When, e.g., we think of ourselves as having moved our hand, we are thinking of ourselves as having performed an activity of a certain kind, an activity of whose nature we are dimly aware in doing the action and of which we can become more clearly aware by reflecting on it. And that we are aware of its special nature is shown by our unhesitatingly distinguishing it from other special mental activities such as thinking, wondering, and imagining. If we ask 'what is the word used for this special kind of activity?' the answer it seems has to be 'willing'." (Prichard, 1969b:189)

Similarly, Hume states that 'the mind wills a certain event: immediately another event, unknown to ourselves, and totally different from the one intended is produced: This event produces another equally unknown: Till at last, through a long succession, the desired event is produced' (Hume, Enquiry, p.66)

So volitions are seen as special acts by means of which we perform ordinary everyday actions such as raising an arm, opening a door or sinking a submarine. They are special, and differ from these more familiar actions by being executive. Thus, to perform any ordinary action we have first to perform an act of volition.

But this is peculiar, since volitions are supposed to make sense of the distinction between actions and other events. How can volitions fill this logical role if they themselves are construed as actions?

If an event qualifies as an action through being

produced by a volition and volitions, in turn, are themselves actions, then they too must be produced by volitions, which being actions, must be produced by further volitions, and so on. This leads to an unacceptable regress, such that no volitions, and hence, no actions ,could ever occur, for they would require the prior completion of an infinite regression of volitions.

Can this problem be overcome? There seem to be two available strategies. Either we deny that volitions are themselves actional, or we characterise them as actions by some criterion other than that of 'produced by a volition'.

The difficulty with the latter approach is that it leaves us with a less than full account of the nature of action. In trying to understand the difference between actions and non-actions it suggests that the former are produced by volitions, but there are some actions, namely volitions, which are not so produced. This means that we do not know how all actions so qualify, for we do not know what makes a volition an action; hence the mystery has only been moved one step further back.

Unfortunately, the temptation here is to have recourse to indefinables, as when Prichard adds:

> "we also have to admit that while we know the general character of that to which we refer when we use the word 'willing', this character is *sui generis* and so incapable of being defined, i.e. of having its nature expressed in terms of the nature of other things." (loc. cit.)

It seems that the 'general character' of volition that we

can know is that it gives rise to other actions, but the aspect of its character that we cannot comprehend is what makes it itself actional. Certainly, to avoid the regress of volitions producing volitions, we would have to understand the nature of volition 'in terms of the nature of other things'. The trouble is that to deny that such understanding is possible simply leaves the problem unsolved, and must lead us to ask why we should regard volition as an act in the first place. Why not adopt the alternative strategy and deny that volitions are actions?

The obvious response is to say that volitions occur first in the sequence of things that we do. As Hume notes, we will, and eventually it comes about that the state of affairs desired is produced. In other words, volition is a means to the action that we wish to perform. So, most ordinary actions are performed 'indirectly', by first performing some other action, namely a volition, which we do directly. This is why Prichard recommended that we should

> "...distinguish those actions in doing which we originate some new state directly from those in which we did this only indirectly, i.e. by originating directly some other state, by which we indirectly originated the final state." (op.cit., p.187)

He adds that

> "what we... originate directly must have been some new state or states... of the nature of which we are ignorant [though] we should insist that in doing any action we must have originated <u>something</u> directly, since otherwise we could not originate anything indirectly." (loc.cit.)

We shall have occasion to say more about this notion of direct action in the following chapter, in the meantime it is important to note that it is this 'originating directly' that Prichard calls 'willing'. Thereby, he argues that in order to perform any action we must perform an act of will, for acts of will are the only actions that we can perform directly.

Here we have reason for supposing that volitions are a species of action. We need something we can describe as 'direct action', and clearly, we do not will by first performing some other action, nor indeed, do we will to will. We will directly, and since an act of will is prior to every other action, in volition, we have our 'direct action'.

Of course, we have already seen that this move leaves us with actions, namely volitions, which qualify as action differently from all other actions. For volitions are not produced by volitions. But is Prichard's argument a good one? It invokes the supposition that volitions are themselves actions, in particular, direct actions, but must we accept the need for such actions?

Clearly, there are many things we do for which we must employ other actions as means. Thus, to use Prichard's examples, we may cure our toothache by swallowing aspirin, and may kill another person by pressing a switch which explodes a charge underneath him. But is this true of all ordinary actions? What of such actions as moving or turning one's head? In such cases, must we perform any other action

in order to achieve the moving or head turning? It is not obviously so. Certainly, many things must take place if I am to move my head or raise my arm; various muscles must tense in conjunction with the firing of a great many nerve cells, amid hectic activity in select areas of one's brain. But none of these would ordinarily qualify as actions by virtue of the fact that they must occur if I am to move my head or raise my arm. So, even if volitions must occur in order for these actions to take place, the volitions do not for this fact, qualify as actions.

It is not at all obvious that we must view all actions 'outside the level of volitions' as indirect; performed by means of acts of will. Neither is it obvious that volitions must be construed as actional. Certainly, willing is something I do, but this does not make it an action, for many things are 'doings', whilst not being actions.

The main reason for supposing that volitions are <u>not</u> actions remains: otherwise we are unable to explain what an action is, as distinct from a mere happening. Melden puts this point forcefully:

> "Grant for a moment that an event labelled an 'act of volition' produces a muscle movement, there is a difference surely between an act of volition occurring and my performing such an act... who can say that volitions may not occur through no doing of the subject...? If so, willing the muscle movement is not enough, one must will the willing of the muscle movement, and so on <u>ad infinitum</u>. Here someone may retort impatiently: 'When I will a muscle movement, I will it and that is the end of the matter; there is no other doing by virtue of which this act of volition gets done- I simply will the movement of the muscle.' But even if this reply were correct it would not serve

> to explain what an action is as distinguished from a mere happening- it explains the 'action'... in terms of an internal act of willing, and hence all it does at best is to change the locus of action." (Melden, 1961:45-6)

By not viewing volitions as actional we are relieved of the need to explain how they qualify as actions, and we do not lose the explanatory power of the concept of volition to explain the difference between actions and other events. The account still says that this difference lies in the fact that actions are those produced by volitions, even if volitions are not construed as actions in their own right. But then isn't this simply a variety of causal theory, which names volitions as the causes? If so, what is there to choose between a non-volitional causal account, and one such as we are considering?

(2) VOLITIONS AS CAUSES OF ACTIONS

The view under consideration is that actions are those events produced by volitions. This clearly represents the essential nature of actions as located in the events which give rise to them; which is the characteristic of the causal theory of action. For such a theory locates the essential difference between actions and non-actions in the events which cause them. If it presents actions as those events which are caused by volitions the volition theory is a variety of causal theory. But do volitions cause actions?

Ryle refers to

> "the doctrine that overt actions... are results

> of counterpart hidden operations of willing..." (Ryle, 1949:63)

Similarly, Richard Taylor states that

> "according to the volitional theory an observable act simply <u>is</u> a bodily movement caused by a certain kind of change in the mind called a 'volition'." (Taylor, 1966:66)

Interestingly, the view that volitions cause actions seems to be confined to critics of the volition theory. Prichard denies that what we will is an action. Instead, he construes an action as the act of willing, or, perhaps, this willing in conjunction with its effects. This means that the effect of willing could never be an action, for if an action is the willing of something, then the willing of an action 'must in turn be the willing of the willing of something else, and so on'. (Prichard, 1969b:64; this point is clarified by Bruce Aune in Aune, 1974:110-111.)

Prichard is by no means alone in denying that volitions cause actions. Lawrence Davis, in his book 'Philosophy of Action', suggests that this false assumption gives rise to many of the usual objections to the volition theory:

> "Many have assumed that volitions are supposed to precede and cause actions... Volition theories seemed to say that an action such as moving one's arm qualified as an action because the arm's motion was caused by a volition. Why should this genesis qualify the arm movement as an action? Unless it was assumed that volitions were themselves actions- it was accepted as plausible that a limb motion caused by an action would itself be an action; so it seemed that volitional theories allowed no answer other than causation by <u>another</u> volition. In this way volitional theories of action were made to appear ridiculous, as

> requiring an infinite regress of volitions, preceding any bodily movement that counted as an action." (Davis, 1979:38-9)

We see that there are grounds for denying not only that volitions are actions, but also that volitions cause actions. As Hugh McCann correctly notes:

> "volition cannot be conceived as merely accompanying the actions performed by means of it. Rather it is essential to them, being the key element in the process necessary for the result of those actions to count at all as changes brought about by the agent." (McCann, 1974:467)

This idea, that volition is a key element in action, rather than an accompanying cause, is an important one, to which we shall return shortly. First, a final comment on the mistaken view that volitions cause actions.

By appealing to our familiar talk of willing it should become evident that we do not suppose that actions are the results of volition. In the arm raising example, there is clearly a difference between my raising my arm and my arm rising. The former is an action while the latter is merely a bodily movement. What part would we suppose volition to have in the production of each? What does one will to do in an instance of raising one's arm? Does one will one's raising one's arm? Surely not. We do not will ourselves to do things, rather we will the things that we do. Hence, we do not will ourselves to raise an arm; we will the arm to rise. Clearly, the arm rising that we will is not the action of raising one's arm, for, ex hypothesi, these are distinct. We will the movement, not the action. In McCann's words:

> "what is willed must be that a change or sequence of changes of certain types occur... [which] are the projected results of the actions the agent undertakes through the volitional act." (loc. cit.)

We see therefore, that in this important respect, the volition theory differs from the causal theory of action. For volitions are not causes of actions. But what then is the relation of volition to action if not that of cause to effect? Looking again at raising one's arm, we suggest that the volition causes the arm rising, not the action of raising the arm. This movement of the arm stands in relation to the action of raising the arm as its 'result', which relation holds between an action and the event which logically must occur if the action is to be performed. This idea (which derives from Von Wright, 1963:39ff.) is explained by Stoutland in his 'Basic actions and causality':

> "M cannot have moved his arm unless his arm moved; the event which is the movement of his arm is the intrinsic result of the action which is his moving his arm. Every action has an intrinsic result, which is part of the way we specify the action, but only part because an action cannot be identified with any [such] event." (Stoutland, 1968:470)

Volitions cause those events which are 'results' of actions, and thereby, performing an action consists in bringing about such a result, viz. by willing the result one thereby performs the action. On this account, actions are still characterised by their relation to volitions, though this relation is more complex than that envisaged by causal

theorists, who wish to characterise action in terms of its causal genesis in reasons, beliefs, desires and the like. Now that we can see the key difference between the proposed volitionism and the causal approach the next logical step is to subject this volition theory to some scrutiny.

(3) THE STRUCTURE OF ACTION

On the account being outlined, actions are characterised 'intrinsically' in terms of volitions. Thereby, we have an instance of action whenever an 'action-result' is produced by a volition. In turn, 'action-result' is explained as a specific event whose occurrence is the logically necessary condition for the occurrence of a specific action. Thus construed, an action is never identical to its result, nor are actions what volitions cause. An action is the bringing about (causally) of an action-result, by volition. I have expressed this by identifying the action with the causing of the result.

Though it may appear obscure, this notion of a causing is quite straightforward. Whenever one event causes another, a causing has occurred. The causing is the successful bringing about of an effect by a cause. My story is that actions form a subclass of the class of causings.

A criticism that strikes one immediately is that this way of characterising actions suggests a logical misdemeanour, for in the attempt to understand the nature of action we are presented with a scheme to characterise actions as the causing of action-results by volitions. Yet,

how are we to understand 'action-result' if not in relation to action? Furthermore, the concept of volition seems also to invoke the concept of action, for what distinguishes one volition from another if not the action that it is intended to produce? Can we accept an account of action which is so apparently circular and uninformative?

Although this looks to be a serious criticism, in fact it does not cut very deep. The present account of action is not circular in any way which is vitiating, nor indeed is it uninformative.

Clearly, to comprehend 'action-result' we must appreciate what may count as action. But we already have this appreciation. We know very well that arm movings, window smashings, moon landings and the like, are action-results, for we know that people have the facility to move their arms, smash windows, and land on the moon. It is this facility we call the ability to act. Our attempt to elucidate action does not presuppose ignorance of what may be regarded as actions, for the purpose is not to discover what actions there are. It is not a search for actions, for we have no doubt that actions exist; we know just where to find them and can recognise them easily.

The main purpose of any philosophical theory of action must be to clarify the nature of action. It must make clearer what an action is, in terms which relate specifically to what we ordinarily understand as action. Consequently, it is entirely apt that such an enterprise should use concepts which depend upon our prior

understanding of the range of actions. Its aim is to analyse actions; to arrive at a deeper understanding of what binds together all the different things we call by this name.

Clearly, with this aim in mind, we may legitimately employ concepts such as 'action-result' and 'volition', so long as these are considered coherent notions in their own right. That they relate to, and depend upon our familiar understanding of action is only to be expected, and is no indication of logical foul-play. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the key concepts employed in this enterprise stand up to close scrutiny.

Since we are attempting to elucidate the nature of action in terms of volition it follows that the difference we suppose to exist between the mere occurrence of an event and someone's producing such an event is to be explained in relation to volition. In other words, the difference between actions and mere happenings must be a difference in the relation of these events to volitions. This seems to match the volition theory as Melden conceives of it:

> "What then is the difference between my muscles being contracted and my contracting my muscles? A familiar doctrine is that in the latter case I will my muscles to move; in the former case there are causes other than the act of volition. So I move my muscles by performing an act of volition which in turn produces a muscle movement." (Melden, 1960:71; page reference to White, 1970.)

Against such a view Melden forwards a strong objection:

> "Grant for a moment that an event labelled 'an act of volition' produces a muscle movement; there

> is a difference surely between the occurrence of such an event and my producing it. We saw that there is a difference between the occurrence of a muscle movement and my moving that muscle; ...But equally there would seem to be a difference between the occurrence of an act of volition and my performing such an act. Who can say that volitions may not occur through no doing of the subject and in consequence of interior mental events deep within the hidden recesses of the self? If so, willing the muscle movement is not enough; one must will the willing of the muscle movement, and so on ad infinitum." (loc. cit.)

We shall see that this resembles a Rylean argument, where a regress is claimed on the view that volitions are themselves voluntary. In turn, it will emerge that Ryle's regress argument fails, in the meantime we can consider Melden's argument.

According to Melden, volitions are invoked to explain the difference between the mere occurrence of events and the performance of such events by an agent. Yet, if such a difference may persist at the level of volitions then the theory is further required to explain how the mere occurrence of a volition differs from the performance of an act of volition. Either this explanation is proferred in terms of volitions, in which case a regress is invoked, or the essential difference between actions and mere occurrences remains unexplained.

It would appear from this argument that an explanation of the difference between actions and mere events cannot be provided in terms of volition. But this is so, only if we grant that at the level of volitions there may be a difference between the performance of such an event and its

mere (non-performed) occurrence. Could we doubt this difference?

If there are volitions, then they are presumably things that we do; we talk of acts of volition after all. But as acts they differ crucially from all other actions. Even if we grant that volitions are a species of act, it does not follow that a volition may occur as a mere (non-performed) event. A good reason for supposing that volitions cannot happen in such a fashion comes from considering action-results.

When we consider any familiar action, raising one's arm, for example, its action-result is easily appreciated, viz. one's arm rising. And if we consider this result in relation to the action we can see that the difference between action and action-result is precisely the difference between action and mere occurrence. Hence, when we ask about the difference between action and mere event this is really the same as asking about the relation of action to action-result. In other words, it is to ask what is special or different about those instances of action-results that we want to deem as actions.

The answer I am offering to this question is that actions are instances of action-results caused by volitions. But then Melden asks about the occurrence of volitions themselves. What of the difference between the performance of a volition and its mere occurrence? To ask this is to ask after the difference between the act of volition and its result, and such a question can only make sense if we are

able to distinguish between the supposed action and its result. Otherwise, we have no distinction between action and mere happening. So what of volitions? What is the action-result of my willing to raise my arm? When I raise my arm the action-result is the arm going up, so when I will to raise my arm the action-result is what? My willing to raise my arm? The occurrence of my willing to raise my arm? But these are one and the same. The result of my willing cannot be that a willing occurs, for the occurrence of my willing simply <u>is</u> my willing.

Clearly, we cannot in this case distinguish between an act of volition and its action-result. But what does this prove? In effect, it shows that Melden's argument against the volition account fails. For the problem that Melden envisaged, that of explaining the difference between performing an act of volition and the mere occurrence of such a volition, does not arise. There can be no such difference, hence, there is nothing to explain.

In defence of Melden, it may be thought that I have overcome his argument by begging the question against him. After all, Melden did not pose the problem in terms of actions and action-results. He only asked about the difference between actions and mere occurrences. Have I not avoided this problem by foisting these different terms upon him and manipulating them to suit my purpose?

In response, I can only reaffirm that the difference between actions and mere occurrences is precisely the difference between actions and their related results. Thus,

in Melden's own example, he asks after the difference between moving one's muscle and the mere occurrence of a muscle movement. This is the same as asking the difference between the action of moving one's muscle and its result, for the result of such an action is the occurrence of just such a muscle movement. Consequently, his question of the difference between the mere occurrence of a volition and the performance of an act of volition is justifiably considered in terms of action and action-result, with the inevitable conclusion that in this case, there can be no difference.

Anticipating the volitionist's response to his earlier argument Melden adds the following:

> "someone may retort impatiently: 'When I will a muscle movement, I will it and that is the end of the matter; there is no other doing by virtue of which this act of volition gets done- I simply will the movement.' But even if this reply were correct it would not serve to explain what an action is as distinguished from a mere happening. It explains the 'action' of raising the arm in terms of an internal action of willing, and hence all it does at best is to change the locus of action." (Melden, 1961:45-6)

Though I have not, I hope, 'retorted impatiently', I certainly maintain that there is no other doing by virtue of which one wills. Is it true then that my explanation does no more than change the locus of action from raising one's arm to the act of volition, thereby leaving unsolved the mystery of the difference between action and mere happening?

On the contrary, this mystery does not remain on the account offered, for their is no scope to distinguish

between action and mere happening at the level of volition. Furthermore, this does not simply conceal the problem for an explanation is given as to what distinguishes actions from mere happenings. The presence of volitions in actions differentiates them from mere events.

We must note too that 'acts of volition' are essentially different from other actions in not having action-results. In fact, volitions do not qualify as actions on the present account. For to be such, a volition would have to be the causing of an action-result by another volition, which it clearly is not. Hence, volitions are not actions. This also means that in providing this form of explanation for action we are not merely changing the locus of agency. Neither are we left with the mystery of what distinguishes actions from mere happenings at this level, for their is no distinction between 'performing' a volition and a volition 'merely happening'.

Yet this brings to light a further puzzle about volition. Given that there is no distinction between performing a volition and the volition's mere occurrence, this raises the question of how volitions come about. I have suggested that there is nothing we do (in the sense of action) whereby we bring about volition. So do volitions simply happen? It seems reasonable to suppose that volitions have natural origins, which may be physiological or psychological in nature. Generally, when someone wills and thereby acts, they have acted for some reason or other. Such a factor may well be instrumental in producing volition.

Nevertheless, though vague, the explanation of how volitions occur is not crucial to our understanding of what counts as action, for volitions are not themselves actions in need of explanation. Of course it remains to be explained in what sense willing is something we do. This shall emerge from the following chapter. In the meantime, so long as we appreciate the key role of volition in the nature of action we are in a position to appreciate where action begins and what differentiates actions from mere events. An action has been performed wherever an action-result occurs as the effect of volition. This production of an action-result by a volition is what I have called 'a causing'; the successful bringing about of an effect by a cause. Hence, actions are causings.

(4) ACTIONS, CAUSINGS AND EVENTS

Although this idea that actions are causings may be unfamiliar, it has at least been considered and rejected by Prichard who explicitly denies that causings can be actions.

According to Prichard, when we perform any action we engage in an activity, but while causing a change may require an activity, it is not itself an activity. Hence, since actions are activities and causings are not, actions cannot be causings. Prichard puts his case in the following passage:

> "Unquestionably the thing meant by 'an action' is an activity. This is so whether we speak of a man's action in moving his hand, or of a body's action such as that of the heart in pumping the blood, or that of one electron in repelling another. But though we think that some man in

> moving his hand, or that the sun in attracting the earth, causes a certain movement, we do not think that the man's or the sun's activity is or consists in causing the movement. And if we ask ourselves: 'Is there such an activity as originating or causing a change in something else?', we have to answer that there is not. To say this, of course, is not to say that there is no such thing as causing something, but only to say that though the causing a change may require an activity, it is not itself an activity." (Prichard, 1969b:188-9)

Prichard's argument is not altogether clear, but I think we can understand what he has in mind. His central contention is that there is no such activity as causing something. He wants to say not that things are not caused, nor that there are no such things as causings. Rather, causing is not an activity. When one body causes another to move, the body which causes the movement indulges in some activity; which presumably would be the concern of the scientist. Saying that one body causes another to move is to say that body A does something which has as a result, the movement of another body, B. Prichard's point is that whatever body A does, is the activity which results in the movement of body B. But A's causing B to move is not some extra activity of A's over and above whatever it is that A does in order to produce the movement in B. Neither is A's causing B to move identical to the activity of A that causes B to move; it is not A's causing B to move that causes B to move, thus, A's causing B to move is not any activity of A.

Thereby, Prichard concludes that A's causing B to move is simply an alternative way of talking about the situation where A does something which has the effect of moving B. The causing is not itself an activity, and since to act is to

engage in an activity, it follows that actions cannot be causings.

In this expanded form, Prichard's argument seems to show that whatever actions may be, they are not causings. Still, I am not inclined to accept this result, and under closer scrutiny we can appreciate that Prichard's argument does not validly reach its conclusion.

Firstly, I would accept Prichard's view that to act is to engage in an activity. What I must show is that causing can be an activity, and thereby, that actions, being activities, may be causings.

Prichard concludes that causing a change is not an activity, on the grounds that whatever the cause does to bring about the effect is an activity which is not identical to the causing of the effect by the cause, viz. it is not the cause's causing the effect which causes the effect. This much is clearly valid. The causing is not identical to the activity of the cause which produces the effect.

Prichard also concludes that the causing is no further activity of the cause. Again, this seems to be true, for the causing is not something that the cause does, over and above producing the effect. Yet from these considerations Prichard cannot validly conclude that the causing is not an activity. He can only conclude that the causing is not an activity of the cause; which view I also endorse. To see that this is not inconsistent with the account I propose, of actions as causings, we have to look again at the structure of action

as I represent it.

Here, an action is the bringing about, or causing of an action-result by a volition. Of this scheme, Prichard would say that the causing of a result by a volition is not identical to the activity of the volition which causes the result. Moreover, the causing is not an activity of the volition over and above its activity which causes the result. This much I accept. But does this mean that the causing is not an activity at all? No, this only shows that the causing is not an activity of the volition. In itself, this is to be expected. The causing 'includes' both cause and effect, so can hardly be an activity of the cause. Still, the causing may be regarded as an activity. But an activity of what? Surely, causing an action-result is properly described as an activity of the agent, and not of his volition?

Prichard is mistaken in thinking that the activity which is action must be an activity of whatever causes arm movements and the like. Indeed, it is this oversight which leads him to the inevitable conclusion that action is something that springs from volition. For given that action is an activity, Prichard leaves himself no option but to identify action with the activity of the will which produces bodily movements and other effects. In this light it is not surprising that he is led to conclude that

> "where we think of ourselves or of another as having done a certain action, the kind of activity of which we are thinking is that of willing (though we should have to add that we are thinking

> of our particular act of willing as having been the doing of the action in question, only because we think it caused a certain change) and that when we refer to some instance of this activity,... we refer to it thus not because we think it was, or consisted in, the causing [of a particular result] but because we think it had a certain change of state as an effect." (op. cit., p.190)

Thus, Prichard was led to construe 'willing' as the only true form of action, with all else mere causal upshot of the activity of our volitions.

In contrast, we may reasonably construe the agent's action as an activity 'on a higher level' than the activity of his volition which produces action-results. Thus, the agent's action is the activity of raising his arm by willing, it is not merely the activity of volition, for by itself this does not constitute action.

Perhaps the fairest comment we can make of Prichard's view is that the central notion upon which it rests, that of action as activity, is far from perspicuous. We noted earlier (in Chapter 4) that the sense in which he uses 'activity' is rather nebulous. As a result, it may be difficult to do full justice to his objection. In contrast, Brian O'Shaughnessy presents a more cogent argument against the view that actions are causings.

O'Shaugnessy's critique of this position centres on his suspicions about the concept of a causing. Thus, he asks:

> "But what is 'a causing'? ...it can hardly be some third distinct event, a distinctive causing-event, sandwiched between any two causally linked events. This would be to suppose it just another link in a causal chain- one that threatens to multiply itself to infinity. For if every event

> has a cause so has the causing-event; and so on indefinitely. Therefore it cannot be a distinctive event. And it cannot be either of the causally linked events. Indeed, it simply is not an event at all." (O'Shaughnessy, 1973:383-4)

This argument would appear to have something in common with Prichard's criticism of actions as causings. The main thrust of O'Shaughnessy's case is the contention that a causing cannot be identified with either the cause or the effect in any causal sequence, nor can it be considered an event distinct from these two. There being no other alternative, O'Shaugnessy concludes that causings cannot be events at all.

The first of O'Shaughnessy's points is clearly correct. In any causal sequence, the causing is not identical either with the cause or the effect. It cannot be the cause for this may occur without the effect, in which case there is no causing. And similarly, the causing cannot be the effect alone for this may conceivably occur without the cause. The causing is apparently neither the cause nor the effect. But what then is it?

O'Shaughnessy's second point is that the causing cannot be a third event distinct from the cause and the effect. If it were, being an event, it must also have its cause. But then we would have a further causing-event distinct from the original causing-event and its cause, which in turn must also have its own cause, and so on. As O'Shaughnessy notes, either we accept the generation of infinitely many events where we originally supposed there were only two, or we deny that causings are events distinct from cause and effect. The

potency of O'Shaughnessy's argument must leave us asking once again, what is a causing?

According to the details of causings already presented, they would appear to be composites of cause and effect, such that there is no causing unless there occurs a cause that takes effect. So, we only have a causing when we have both a cause and related effect. The question is whether this account of causings treats them as events. There is some temptation to say that it does. After all, we might refer to the wind blowing the leaves from the trees, which is surely a causing. The wind blowing is the cause, while the leaves being removed from the trees is the effect. Yet, our reference is not to either of these events alone. It is to the particular combination of these two events. Perhaps it would be more apt to refer to the wind blowing the leaves from the trees not as an event in its own right, otherwise we invoke O'Shaughnessy's infinite generation of events, but as a sequence of events. This is far more plausible than treating it as a particular event.

Supposing that a causing is a sequence of events entails that it is not an event; a sequence of events is no more an event than a flock of seagulls is a bird. But can we suppose that actions (being causings) are not events?

In O'Shaughnessy's eyes, if causings are not events in their own right they cannot be identified with actions. As he notes:

"[This] ...leaves us with the claim that the act

> is not an event. But that is certainly unacceptable. After all, we know it has event-effects, such as the breaking of an electric light globe, and event-causes, such as deciding or coming to believe that now is the time for the intended act; and we know it has an unrepeatable position in space-time, and was constituted through the on-going of an activity of raising an arm. What more do we need if we are to demonstrate that it was an event?" (op. cit., p.834)

Thus, O'Shaughnessy locates reasons for thinking of actions as events. If they were not, they could not have events as their effects, nor as their causes. And actions do appear to have 'unrepeatable positions' in time and space. Does this not prove that they are events?

Clearly, it only does so if it is solely events that have event-causes and effects and unique spatio-temporal location. But this does not appear to be the case. Firstly, consider position in space and time. An occurrence of the wind blowing the leaves from my garden trees (a causing, and hence not an event), takes place over a specific time-period, and in a specific place. There is no obvious reason why causings generally should not be accorded with 'unrepeatable positions in space-time'. Such a feature is not uniquely true of events, hence the fact that it is true of actions does not establish that they are events. What about their possession of event-causes and event-effects?

As a result of the wind defoliating my trees, many events might ensue. I might be angered; I may be awe-struck at the workings of nature; a neighbour's sleeping cat may disappear under fallen leaves. Similarly, such a causing might <u>result from</u> a sudden change in air pressure at high altitude, or an explosion at a nearby factory. Do such

examples show that causings have both event-causes and event-effects? If so, then either causings are events after all, or we must reject O'Shaughnessy's contention that possession of such a feature is a hallmark of events.

It is tempting to accept that causings do have such causes and effects, but I do not believe this to be the case. Strictly speaking, such events are causes or effects not of the causing, but of the cause or the effect that are its components. Thus, the change in atmospheric pressure causes the wind to blow fiercely through my garden. This effect (of the change in atmospheric pressure) causes the leaves to fall from my trees, which in turn causes my bout of anger.

We can say that the wind blowing the leaves from the trees (the causing) resulted from the sudden change in air pressure, or that my bad temper was caused by the wind blowing the leaves from my trees (again, the causing). So it is apparently permissible to talk of the causing both as cause and effect of events. But I would suggest that this does not show that the causing is itself an event. Rather, such causal talk is a shorthand or elliptical way of detailing more than one causal relation. Thus, to say that the causing resulted from a sudden change in the atmosphere informs us not merely of the immediate effect of this change (i.e. the wind blowing as it did), but also of its more distant effect (i.e. the defoliation of my trees).

So, although causings are not events, we may sensibly talk as if they have event-causes and event-effects. Given

that we speak of actions as having such causes and effects, is it plausible to construe actions as not events? There is reason for thinking so.

If we consider an action, such as my moving my arm, this may have as a result, the breaking of a precious Chinese vase. Clearly, the breaking of this heirloom is an event, but what of my action of moving my arm?

It is obvious that the movement of my arm constitutes an event. Indeed, this event can be seen as the immediate cause of the vase breaking. But this arm movement is not my action. There is a logical difference between my arm moving and my moving my arm. On my account of action, I suggest understanding my moving my arm as on a par with the wind blowing the leaves from my trees. In each case, the description is of no mere event-occurrence, but of an event-sequence. Moving my arm can be seen to consist in a sequence of two causally related events, my willing the arm movement (which is the cause), and the arm movement (which is its effect).

Thus, we can construe actions as causings (causal sequences of events) and interpret statements which purport to ascribe event-causes and event-effects to actions precisely as I have suggested for other causings. To say that my action of moving my arm caused the vase to break, is elliptical. It conveys the fact that the vase broke as a result of the arm movement (this was its immediate cause), and this, in turn, was caused by my willing the arm movement (this was the more distant cause of the vase breaking).

Understood in this way it makes perfect sense to talk of actions as if they have event-causes and effects. But this does not signify that actions are events. (I note that Kent Bach has recently argued that 'actions are not events but instances of... the relation of bringing about (or making happen), whose terms are agents and events' (Bach, 1980:114). This has obvious parallels with my own account.)

Despite its counter-intuitive air, there is no logical absurdity in the view that actions are not events. Instead, actions, like other causings, are sequences of causally related events. So, in opposition to O'Shaughnessy, we are able to reaffirm the view that actions are causings, with the clarification that these are not events.

Before moving to consider how the account of actions as causings accommodates the concept of basic action, it is worth noting a corollary of my view that actions are not events. This gives a new perspective on the vexed question of whether reasons may be causes of actions, for strictly speaking, actions do not have causes. Only events have causes and actions are not events.

It will be true nonetheless that actions have causally necessary conditions, even though no causal conditions could be sufficient for action. Thus, while there are both necessary and sufficient causal conditions for the occurrence of any event A, and also for its effect, event B, there are no causally sufficient conditions for A causing B. The causal conditions may ensure that event A occurs and

also that event B occurs, they cannot ensure (by causation) that A will cause the occurrence of B.

So we can appreciate that actions, being causings, are not caused. Thus, neither reasons nor anything else can be a cause of action.

CHAPTER 6 : BASIC ACTION

(1) DAVIDSON AND PRIMITIVE ACTION

We shall see that Prichard's distinction between direct and indirect actions has re-emerged in the writings of later philosophers, who believe that positive lessons can be drawn by attending to this relation between direct and indirect action.

The insight behind Prichard's distinction is the fact that events are often attributed to agents as their actions because these events have resulted from, or been brought about by, other of that agent's actions. Thus, if I throw a stone, I perform an action, and if the stone I throw breaks a window, then I have broken a window. Breaking the window will be my action because it resulted from my throwing the stone that broke the window. So, Prichard urges that

> "we should distinguish those actions in doing which we originated some new state directly from those in which we did this only indirectly, i.e. by originating directly some other state by originating which we indirectly originated the final state." (Prichard, 1969b:187)

But what is the importance of this distinction?

We have seen that Prichard employs it as a stage in his analysis of action. His reasoning being that indirect actions only count as actions by virtue of their relation to direct actions. Hence, to fully appreciate the nature of actions we have to attend to direct actions; for it is clear

that these qualify as action by some criterion other than their relation to other of the agent's actions.

This logic, combined with the causal account of action as bringing something about, led Prichard to support the view that agents typically perform an activity of willing whenever they do an action. This was Prichard's analysis of direct action. So we can see Prichard's distinction as directed toward an understanding of what makes something an action. The distinction helps because it separates one class of actions (indirect), from another (direct). This can be regarded as progress because we are able to appreciate why indirect actions come to be deemed actions; it is because of their relation to direct actions. So, for a complete understanding of the nature of action the inquiry should turn to direct actions, and how these qualify as actions.

Of course, one might ask why we should believe in the existence of direct actions at all. But it is clear that indirect actions 'require' direct actions. Not all action can be indirect, for such actions only come about if there is some direct action which is performed as a means to the indirect. This is why Prichard says

> "we should insist that in doing any action we must have originated <u>something</u> directly, since otherwise we could not originate anything indirectly." (p.187)

Davidson also appreciates that

> "not every event we attribute to an agent can be explained as caused by another event of which he

> is agent: some events must be primitive in the sense that they cannot be analysed in terms of their causal relations to acts of the same agent." (Davidson, 1971:10)

If we supposed that every action could be analysed as an event causally related to another of the agent's actions, this would imply that there could be no first action in such a series. For this would be to suppose that for every event attributed to an agent as his action, he must have performed an earlier action; which would mean that no one had performed what was for them a first action, i.e. no 'direct' or 'primitive' action. Unless we are prepared to accept that each agent has a past history of actions, with no beginning, we must accept the alternative. In which case we have a proof of the existence of direct or primitive actions.

These actions, which Prichard termed 'direct', have come to be known variously as 'primitive', 'basic'*, or 'simple'** actions. (* Danto, 1965; ** Feinberg, 1965; In what follows I shall treat these terms as interchangeable.)

Direct actions do not result from any other of our actions; they are actions that we do without doing anything else. So, we might expect that if we follow a series of indirect actions back to the originating causing actions, these may well be bodily movements. (This is the view that Prichard seemed to favour, though he quickly moved to an identification of action with the activity of willing.) To take a few examples: if I embarrass a friend by waving to him across a busy room, I cause his embarrassment by waving my hand, but I do not wave my hand by performing any other

action prior to my hand waving. It seems that I just wave my hand.

Similarly, I may secure a free transfer for the opposition's goalkeeper by scoring the fourth goal against him; I score the goal by deflecting the ball off the referee; I deflect the ball by hitting it with the outside of my right foot; and I hit the ball by swinging my leg forward in a particular manner at a particular instant; but I do not swing my leg by means of any other prior action, I simply swing my leg. Waving my arm and swinging my leg, look like prime candidates for direct actions, since, to use Danto's words:

> "when an individual M performs a basic action a, there is no event distinct from a that both stands to a as cause to effect and is an action performed by M. So when M performs a basic action, he does nothing first that causes it to happen." (Danto, 1965:45; page references to White, 197Ø)

Examples of voluntary bodily movements, such as those above, seem appropriate in this context. Melden appears to have it right when he says:

> "One does not move one's arm by performing another doing which has the motion of one's arm as effect- one simply raises one's arm." (Melden, 1961:65)

From our earlier discussion of Prichard we have seen that there may be difficulties with the view that voluntary bodily movements qualify as basic or direct action. Can it be established that such movements are basic actions?

Davidson, for one, takes a strong line, and argues that

> "if we interpret the idea of a bodily movement generously, a case can be made out for saying that all primitive actions are bodily movements" (op.cit., p.11).

Although he maintains that primitive actions are bodily movements, Davidson's precise views on the relation of primitive actions to their agents is not easy to discern from his writings. He allows that when an agent performs a primitive action such as pointing his finger, it makes sense to say that he causes his finger to move. This seems odd, for if the finger moving is a primitive action, the agent does this without doing anything else as a means. Yet, if when he moves his finger, he must cause his finger to move, this suggests that his moving his finger requires this prior act of causing. And if such a prior act is necessary for the action of finger pointing, this latter action cannot be primitive. Davidson appreciates that his view may face this problem, so he considers the following objection.

In order to point my finger I make certain muscles contract, and this in turn may require that I make certain events take place in my brain, but if it is true that I cause my finger to move by bringing about these internal events, then surely these events, and not the finger movement, must be primitive. Obviously, if these events are primitive actions this conflicts with Davidson's thesis that all primitive actions are bodily movements.

Davidson's reply to this criticism is that although it may be true that I cause my finger to move by contracting muscles and perhaps cause these muscles to contract by making events occur in my brain, this does not show that pointing my finger is not a primitive action, for it does not show that I must do something else that causes it. He points out that doing something that causes my finger to move does not cause me to move my finger, it is moving my finger (p.11). It may not be immediately clear how this defends Davidson's position.

Clearly, he relies on the claim that my bringing about certain internal bodily events is not my doing something else, other than moving my finger. This allows that I may cause my finger to move without doing anything that causes me to move my finger, but it suggests that I may cause the primitive action without doing anything else but perform the primitive action, as when he says 'doing something that causes my finger to move... is moving my finger' (loc.cit.).

There appears to be a tension in Davidson's account. Primitive actions are actions that we perform without use of any prior action; our primitive actions are not caused by any other of our actions. Yet, Davidson seems to admit that we may cause the bodily movements which are our primitive actions.

If we are to make sense of Davidson's position we must interpret him differently. To this end, the important distinction is that he makes between causing my finger to move, and causing me to move my finger. The significance of

this is that although the internal bodily events may cause the finger movement, they do not cause my moving my finger. My finger may move without its being a case of my moving it. It is only in the case where I move my finger that a primitive action occurs. The primitive action in question is not simply the bodily movement, that is, the finger movement. Rather, the primitive action is my causing the finger movement. Hence, Davidson's insistence that my causing my finger to move is not my being caused to move my finger; it is my moving my finger.

We are now in a position to see that Davidson's account is initially misleading. Despite his claim that primitive actions are bodily movements, he identifies these actions not with bodily movements simpliciter, but these movements in relation to their causes. Since it is essential to the conception of causality that one can, in principle, isolate the event taken as cause from that taken as effect, Davidson cannot say that in calling these movements primitive actions, he is providing us with alternative descriptions of these bodily movements. The primitive action is the instance where I move my finger as opposed to any instance where my finger merely moves, and Davidson insists that causing the latter is not causing the former. Since the former is the primitive action and the latter the bodily movement, if causing the one is not causing the other, then they cannot be one and the same. Hence, the primitive action is <u>not</u> the bodily movement.

Perhaps we can get a clearer picture of the situation

in question. Certain internal bodily events cause someone's finger to move in a manner we commonly regard as pointing. Davidson tried to tell us that the bodily movement in such a case could be a primitive action, but I have shown that this is not consistent with his general position which should lead him to regard primitive actions as causings of bodily movements, as opposed to their being simply, bodily movements. Davidson seems to adhere implicitly to this latter view, although explicitly, he appears to deny it. Pursuing this position further, we might ask what is meant by talk of 'my causing my finger to move'?

(2) ACTIONS AS CAUSINGS

Davidson allows that internal bodily events cause the finger movement, but since the occurrence of the cause of (any) event A need not be sufficient for the occurrence of A, logically, the cause of the finger movement may occur without the finger moving. The occurrence of the cause of the finger movement does not entail the occurrence of the finger movement. Nevertheless, the situation is different if we consider the occurrence of a causing of A, as opposed to the occurrence of the cause of A. The occurrence of a causing of A entails that A occurs. Thus, the occurrence of a causing of my finger movement, entails that my finger moves. It follows that a causing is not merely the occurrence of a cause.

From this, it should be clear that in identifying primitive actions with particular causings of bodily

movements, Davidson is not committed to accepting that whatever causes such a movement is a primitive action. He is no more identifying primitive action with the causes of bodily movements than he is identifying them with the effects of particular internal bodily events.

Given then that a primitive action is a certain causing of some bodily movement, and that a causing is the occurrence of a cause that takes effect, someones' performing a primitive action must be their bringing about (causing) a particular effect. A causing of the finger movement is any case where the finger movement was caused to occur, so, specifically, my causing my finger to move is a case where the finger movement is caused to occur by me. So, the primitive action of my moving my finger, is my finger movement being caused to occur by me.

It emerges that the notion of causing one's own bodily movements is central to this conception of primitive action. Obviously, if we are to understand the nature of such actions we must appreciate the respect in which a person can be a cause.

This notion of agents as causes is slightly peculiar. We often speak of people causing things or bringing them about, but what do such locutions mean? We may mean that some action of the agent had such-and-such a consequence, or that something done by the agent, not necessarily an action, had a particular effect. Note however that in either case, when we speak of the agent's causing such-and-such, we talk in a misleading way. To say 'John caused the crash' seems to

be on a par with saying 'the puncture caused the crash', but although both sentences share the same surface structure, they do not have the same deep structure.

Normally, when we use cause and effect language we relate one event, as a cause, to another event, as its effect. Thus, the usual form of causal statement, 'A caused B', relates two events A and B. This is the form of the latter of the above two sentences, 'the puncture caused the crash', but it is not the form of 'John caused the crash'. When we say the puncture caused the crash, we identify one event, the occurrence of the puncture, as the cause of another, the occurrence of the crash. But in saying 'John caused the crash', we make no explicit reference to two events, one the cause, the other the effect. In this case the crash is still the effect, but John himself is not the cause, because John himself is not an event. (See Aune's criticism of agent-causation in the previous chapter.) In the present case, something John did, some event in which John figured, must have been the cause. Then the sentence 'John caused the crash' is not of the form 'A caused B', rather its form is elliptical for 'some event related to person P, caused B'. This event, related to some person, will be either his action or some event which is not his action, but in which his body figured. In this light we can reconsider the question 'how do we cause our own movements?'

An agent's performing a primitive action is his causing the bodily movement B (see figure 1), and this causing consists in his bringing about B by means of the internal

event or events A.

figure 1

primitive action (i.e. a causing)

[A causes B]

The agent can be said to cause B either if A is another of his actions, or if it is merely an event in which his body figures. Obviously, A will always be an event in which the agent's body figures, since it is an internal bodily event, so he must cause B in at least this sense. But can the agent cause B in the sense that A is one of his actions?

Davidson is quite positive that he can. In contrast, Chisholm suggests that although an agent may be said to make certain cerebral events happen when it is these events that cause his finger to move, making these cerebral events happen cannot be said to be something that he does in the sense of action (Chisholm, 1966). To this, Davidson comments that so far as his intuition goes, such cases of making things happen are cases of agency. (op.cit., p.12) Thus, Davidson maintains that A (in figure 1) is also an action of the agent.

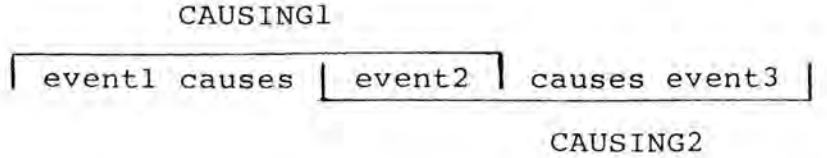
Now if primitive actions are bodily movements that we cause ourselves, and we cause these movements by performing earlier actions by making events occur inside our bodies, then once more it looks as though we perform our primitive actions by performing some prior internal action. But to think this would be to repeat an earlier mistake. The internal bodily events that Davidson deems cases of agency,

do not cause primitive actions. They cause only bodily movements, which are not identical to primitive actions. Nevertheless, Davidson's contention that the events that cause our bodily movements may also be our actions, seems very dubious. Given that such internal events are cases of agency, then the contraction of my arm muscles when I move my arm, must be an action of one sort or another. Specifically, it must be a primitive action or the effect of such an action. In either case, we will be moving far from the view that primitive actions are of the level of bodily movements, unless 'bodily movement' is extended to cover such internal bodily movements as muscle contractions, and whatever occurs in brain events!

By treating primitive actions as causings of bodily movements rather than as identical to the caused bodily movements, Davidson has already avoided a regress; if primitive actions are identified with voluntary bodily movements, and agents cause their primitive actions. In which case, the causing of such actions would be more primitive than the alleged primitive bodily act.

So, Davidson identifies primitive action not with such voluntary movements, but with the causing of such movements. Still, despite its subtlety, this position may not be secure, for there is another regress to which it succumbs. Another diagram will help to make this clear.

figure 2



We may suppose that event3 is a bodily movement which the agent causes in the relevant sense; event2 is the specific muscle contraction(s) that directly cause the bodily movement. Ex hypothesi, event2 is caused by the agent, hence, this causing (causing2), is a primitive action. But, if we allow that event2 is caused in turn by event1 (certain cerebral occurrences), and that this also constitutes a case of agency (as Davidson contends), then the relation between event1 and event2, and that between event2 and event3, is the same. In which case, if causing2 is a primitive action we may suppose that causing1 is too. Also, this line of argument can be repeated if we go back beyond event1 to its internal cause, event0, and so on, beyond this event. So, a regress occurs with each earlier causing qualifying as a primitive action; which clearly violates Davidson's account of primitive action.

Of course, we might suppose that Davidson was too hasty in allowing that the internal bodily events that cause one's movements are, in their own right, instances of agency. The very reasonable alternative is that these are events which I cause, only in the sense that my body figures in their occurrence.

The manoeuvre here is to deem A (in figure 1) an event in which the agent's body figures, hence an event which he causes, but not one of his actions. Still, if we turn again to figure 2, we can see that this change does nothing to

affect the regress argument. If event3 is caused by the agent, other than by one of his actions, and this entitles us to regard causing2 as a primitive action, then, since the same relation holds between event2 and its cause, this should render causing1 a primitive action too. So, it would seem that Davidson's conception of primitive action is ultimately unacceptable.

Apparently, if we are to make sense of this way of construing primitive action we require a characterisation of such actions that would render causing2 (in figure 2) a primitive action, but disqualify causing1 from being an action of the same agent.

(3) THE ACTION-RESULT PROBLEM

A fruitful attempt to specify the nature of primitive action is made by Hugh McCann in 'Volition and basic action'. (McCann, 1974) Here, he argues for a thesis closely allied to that of Prichard; that a resort to volition is advantageous for our understanding of the relation between agent and primitive or basic action.

McCann presents his argument in the context of what he calls 'the action-result problem'. This he explains as follows:

> "When an action is one of bringing about a certain change that change may be called the result of the action in question. Hence the result of raising my arm is that my arm goes up; that of killing Smith is that Smith dies." (p.452)

He adds that

> "results have a number of important features... they are intrinsically tied to action. A result is always a change of a sort an instance of which is logically required for an action of the kind in question to have occurred at all. Thus raising my arm requires that my arm goes up and killing Smith requires that Smith die. This feature of results is what distinguishes them from other changes a person might bring about in performing an action... Results, then are events which are necessary for those actions whose results they are." (loc.cit.)

While results are logically necessary for actions, they are not sufficient for those same actions. Thus, while my arm rising is necessary for my raising my arm, my arm may rise without it being the case that I raised my arm. The result is not sufficient for the action whose result it is.

It is this feature of results that gives rise to what McCann calls 'the action-result problem'; which is the problem, in this example, of explaining what it is, when someone raises his arm, that makes the motion of his arm the result of an action of arm-raising. This form of question may be raised over any instance of action which has a result. One can always ask what it is that makes that event (the result), the result of such an action. As McCann puts it:

> "The general problem of answering such questions... is the problem of providing an account of how it is, when events and processes qualify as results of human actions, they do so qualify." (p.453)

It seems that progress can be made in resolving this problem by noting that as well as results, actions have consequences. (cf. Stoutland, 1968) These are changes one brings about through action, but which, unlike results, are not intrinsically tied to the actions themselves. We must appreciate that while the intrinsic connection between action and its result prevents the result also being a consequence of that same action, it may often be the case that the result of one action is the consequence of another action of the same agent. Thus, for example, my action of moving my arm to strike the vase from its stand, has a result (my arm moving to the vase), and a consequence (the smashing of the vase on the floor). In addition, the vase breaking is the result of my action of smashing the vase. So, the vase smashing may be the consequence of one action of mine, and the result of another.

This is an instance of a pattern of action in which one action, B, causes the result of another action, A, of the same agent, but does not cause A. Whenever this pattern is exemplified, McCann describes A as a causally non-basic action, and B as causally more basic than A. McCann considers this pattern as especially useful in dealing with the action-result problem, since, as he puts it,

> "it allows us to explain how the result of the less basic action A came to occur at all, and to explain it in terms of action on the part of the agent. Thus, if killing Smith involves a causally more basic action of shooting him, we can appeal to the shooting to explain Smith's death. And since the cause is an action, the explanation places the death in an action context. Besides merely accounting for the death, it shows why it

> qualifies as an act of killing, for the explanation amounts to a description of how the agent brought Smith's death about, and bringing about this result is the action of killing Smith." (p.455)

McCann concludes that 'when an action A involves a causally more basic action, the fact that it does provides a solution to the action-result problem for A. The result of A qualifies as a result because it is brought about by performing the causally more basic action B.' (pp.455-6)

This reference to the causal basicness of actions is no mere coincidence. We shall see that McCann is led to consider the precise nature of causally basic actions; these being what Davidson termed 'primitive', and Prichard, 'direct' actions.

We can see that McCann's action-result problem (of saying, when an event qualifies as the result of an action, how it so qualifies), is resolved for a particular action and its result if we can relate them to a causally more basic action of the same agent. In other words, an event qualifies as the result of an action of agent M, if that event is the consequence of an action of agent M.

Although this insight into causally related actions offers us a form of response to the action-result problem, we are left with the possibility that the causally more basic action may itself have a result. In this case, the problem arises again with regard to this action and its result. Although we may locate a causally more basic action to resolve this new instance of the problem, it can 're-emerge', in a regress, with each successive causally

more basic action having its own result to explain.

McCann notes that such a series must have an end, that is, there must be a causally (most) basic action. Otherwise,

> "if every action encountered in this type of analysis involves both a result and a causally more basic action, one would have to bring about an infinite series of further changes in order to bring about any change or set of changes at all. Men cannot do this, but they perform actions with results all the time. Hence the analysis of such actions in terms of the causal pattern must eventually terminate in an action that does not involve such a sequence." (p.456)

Clearly, the actions which commence such a causal sequence will be causally basic, which is to say that the results of such actions, if they have results, are not effects (consequences) of other of the agent's actions. We see thereby, that McCann's approach to this action-result problem, leads him to the familiar conclusion that there must be direct, primitive or basic actions, which are causally fundamental to other of an agent's actions. Consequently' McCann is also faced with the task of explaining the nature of such actions, that is, of explaining the sense in which the agent performs basic actions, if this does not require the performance of some yet more basic act on the part of the agent.

McCann's action-result problem leads him to interesting conclusions. It is clear for causally basic actions, that, if they have results, these events are not consequences of any more basic action. Yet it is difficult to envisage any actions (certainly at the level of bodily movements), that

do not have results. In which case, we are able to raise the action-result problem again; unless we suppose that there may be causally basic actions that do not have results. As McCann says.

> "no action that consists in bringing about a bodily change can be causally basic unless we have an alternative device for solving the action-result problem." (p.457)

After rejecting a 'reasons as causes' approach to solving this problem (pp.457-463), McCann argues that treating thinking as action affords a solution to the action-result problem. His reasons for this view being that thinking typically qualifies as action, and thinking does not have results in the action-sense. Furthermore, by introducing the concept of volition as a particular mode of thought, he is able to present 'volitional thought' as causally basic action.

To begin with, there may be some doubt that thought counts as action. McCann assumes that it 'characteristically counts as action', and claims that

> "the chief benefit is that it makes possible a solution to the action-result problem, for this problem does not arise about thoughts. Unlike acts of moving a finger or flexing a muscle, thoughts do not have results." (p.463)

This latter point is illustrated by reference to the mental act of thinking of the number 1:

> "Here there is no event I bring about which is logically required for the act's occurrence, yet

> not sufficient for it, as the motion of my finger is in the case where I move it." (loc.cit.)

Although the content of the thought is distinguishable from the thinking of it, the content (the number 1) is not an event, hence not an event that is brought about in thinking of the number 1. Neither can the result of my thinking of the number 1, be that I think of this number, for, that I think of it is not an event distinct (and necessary but not sufficient) for my thinking of the number 1. That I think of this number simply <u>is</u> my mental act of thinking of this number. Clearly, the thought cannot be its own result. It appears therefore that thoughts would have no results. So, McCann concludes,

> "that acts of thinking do not have results means there can be no action-result problem about thinking. If there is no result to be distinguished from an action, there can be no question as to what makes it a result. It follows that all acts of thinking <u>must be causally basic</u>."

and adds that,

> "the main point of theoretical importance about volition should now be obvious. For volition too is thought, and hence not possessed of a result... unlike raising an arm, volition involves no event about which such a question can sensibly be asked. Consequently, volition must be causally basic if it occurs at all." (p.466)

Obviously, if all familiar cases of action with results, have volitions as their causally basic actions, we have a solution to the action-result problem. This problem will not arise for volitions as actions, for volitions, in keeping with thoughts generally, do not have results.

Looking in detail at McCann's arguments we can see similarities between the strategy he employs and that employed by Prichard. One significant feature is that McCann does not argue for the existence of volition any more than did Prichard Rather, he suggests that belief in volition affords a means of resolving the action-result problem. In similar vein, Prichard suggests that belief in volitions enables us to comprehend the logical structure of action.

Actually, the reasons each finds to invoke volition, are similar. McCann seeks to explain how events come to be action-results, and does so via the concept of causal basicness. This means that an event's being an action-result is explained in terms of its causal relation to another action of the same agent. Essentially, this is Prichard's conception of indirect action, such that an event bearing the causal relation to another of the agent's actions thereby qualifies as indirect relative to this earlier action.

McCann's search for a solution to the action-result problem is a search for causally basic action, that is, for action which does not have a result caused by another action of the same agent. In these terms, causally basic action will correspond to Prichard's direct action, which is action that one does without doing any other action as a means.

Above all else, the feature that McCann shares with Prichard is his wish to construe volition as action. In this respect, the principal difference is that unlike McCann,

Prichard does not equate volition with direct action (causally basic action). Indeed, this gave rise to one of my objections to Prichard's account of volition as action; to the effect that volition, if action, must count either as direct or indirect action.

We may suppose that McCann's strategy offers a way of reinstating the Prichardian view of volition as action. Thus, McCann may say that Prichard did everything right except in his failure to appreciate that volition must be causally basic, and must therefore count as direct action, being the means one employs in order to do anything else whatsoever.

In consequence, although Prichard never details the action-result problem as such, we may see McCann's account as essentially similar to Prichard's. Do we thereby have an adequate account of basic action?

The most appealing aspect of McCann's account is not only that it gives us reason for belief in volition, but that it resolves the action-result problem in a precise and neat way. In particular, the resort to volitions as actions which have no results, enables McCann to answer the action-result issue by means of a single principle; the relation of causal basicness.

It is clear from McCann's analysis that this relation solves the action-result problem for any action-result that is caused by another action of the same agent. Also from this analysis, it follows that there must be causally basic

actions. (A line of argument familiar from both Prichard and Davidson.) These causally basic actions are correctly characterised as actions whose results are not consequences of any other actions of the relevant agent. In McCann's view, volitions fit this role because, in keeping with other 'modes of thought', they do not have results.

Clearly, if an action has no result then it is not an action with a result caused by another action of the agent. That is, it is not a causally non-basic action. Hence, it is a causally basic action. This is how McCann concludes that volitions would be basic actions, and would resolve the problem over action-results.

Despite its apparent plausibility, I shall suggest that there is an alternative account of basic action which is preferable to McCann's.

(4) BASIC ACTION AND RESULTS

By definition, causally basic actions are those whose results are not caused by any other actions of the same agent. For this reason, we may be a trifle uneasy about accepting volitions as causally basic. After all, it is not as if volitions have results not caused by other actions. Volitions simply have no results at all. In all strictness therefore, we might prefer to look for basic actions amongst those actions that do have results.

McCann would oppose this on two counts. Firstly, if causally basic actions have results then the action-result

problem remains outstanding for the results of these actions. Secondly, volitions are readily construed as actions with no results. The force of this first point is that denying volition as basic action requires that we invoke an additional principle to explain how the results of (non-volitional) basic actions come to be the results of actions at all. So, for simplicity of explanation, perhaps we should prefer McCann's solution, since it invokes only one principle to resolve the action-result problem, viz., the relation of causal basicness.

The force of McCann's second point is less evident: if volitions are construed as action and not as causally basic, we have difficulty of knowing what to say of the causal status of volitions as actions. In short, we would reinstate Prichard's difficulty of portraying volition as action, but neither direct nor indirect action; thereby conflicting with his comprehensive classification of actions into direct and indirect.

For McCann, a similar problem arises if we treat volition as action yet insist that causally basic actions have results. The classification of actions as causally basic or non-basic is comprehensive and does not allow a third category of action, volition, which is neither causally basic (since it has no result), nor causally non-basic (since it has no result caused by another action).

While we can appreciate the motivation for McCann's position, we should also note its principal drawbacks. Although the solution he offers to the action-result problem

is admirable in its simplicity, by relying on a single principle of causal basicness and resorting to volitions as actions without results, McCann is then left with a significant question unanswered, viz. 'how do volitions qualify as actions?'

In effect, McCann answers the related question, 'how do non-basic actions qualify as actions?' His solution to the action-result problem enables us to see that non-basic actions are actions in so far as they are the bringing about of an action-result by another action of the same agent.

In answering the action-result question, McCann goes some way toward answering a related problem about action itself. This is expressed in the question 'when an action is attributed to an agent, how does it qualify as his action?' McCann's account of how events qualify as action-results implicitly details how actions are attributable to agents. Thus, 'the death of Jones' qualifies as an action-result because Jones's death is caused by my action of pulling the trigger of a gun. And in turn, 'killing Jones' qualifies as my non-basic action because it was my action of pulling the trigger that had Jones's death as a consequence. This response makes sense of all causally non-basic actions, for they are attributable to an agent by virtue of their being the bringing about of action-results by other of his actions.

While McCann's principle of causal basicness adequately resolves the action-result problem, it is not sufficient to resolve this related problem. For it remains a puzzle as to

how causally basic actions come to be attributable to agents. Thus, McCann has additionally to explain how volitions qualify as actions. Before discussing how this issue may be resolved, a look at a further problem in McCann's account.

To his credit, McCann appreciates that his construal of thinking as action will ultimately have to be defended. In the absence of this defence, we may still indicate one aspect of this view that is likely to be problematic.

While McCann may, with some justice, treat thinking as action, and likewise, regard all volitions as thoughts, it is not reasonable to construe all thoughts as volitions. I take this to be a matter of commonsense; indeed, McCann does not demur on this point. Nevertheless, this fact is inherently troublesome for McCann's position.

If thought is action, and not all thoughts are volitions, then there are some non-volitional actions which lack results. In other words, those thoughts which are actions, but not volitions, do not have results. What then do we say about the causal status of these actions? It would appear that they qualify as causally basic actions too, which means that McCann has a further detail to explain, viz. how these non-volitional causally basic actions come to be actions.

We have seen that causally non-basic actions so qualify by virtue of their ultimate causal link to volition (i.e. to causally basic action). But for non-volitional thoughts

construed as actions, it is not possible to explain their action-status by reference to volition. Such thoughts cannot be actions by virtue of being caused by volition, for this would render them causally less basic than volition, which, ex hypothesi, they are not.

Furthermore, this would mean that in order to think these non-volitional thoughts one would first have to will them by means of a volitional thought. Presumably, all such thoughts are conscious, so we should be aware of thinking two thoughts whenever we think a non-volitional thought. When I deliberately think of pruning my roses I am not conscious of having to think some volitional thought first, in order to think of the pruning. While we may be active in thinking at least some non-volitional thoughts, it is not plausible that we must always think a volitional thought first in order to think these others.

We can see that McCann's strategy for dealing with the action-result problem leaves open two important issues. It remains to be seen firstly, why volitions count as actions, and secondly, how non-volitional (but actional) thoughts so qualify. This is worth bearing in mind since the main incentive to adopting McCann's approach is its alleged explanatory power.

Significantly, there is an alternative treatment of causally basic action, to which allusion has already been made. Since causally basic actions are those actions whose results are not the consequences of any earlier actions, we may defy McCann and insist that basic actions must have

results.

A consequence of making this manoeuvre is that I am also left with two details to explain. In this case, I am required to say how the results of causally basic actions come to be action-results, also, I must account for the actional nature of volition. After all, if causally basic actions are actions with results, and volitions are actions without results, what is the relation of volition as action, to causally basic action? Volitions cannot be causally more basic actions, for they cannot be more basic than basic actions.

My response to the latter of these two details is straightforward. There is no problem in explaining the relation of volitions to causally basic actions if we suppose that volitions are not actions. If volitions are not actions, their relation to causally basic action is simply one of causation. This means that causally basic actions will be whatever actions have results directly caused by volitions. Since volitions are not regarded as actions they are no 'threat' to the status of these causally basic actions.

Of course, the action-result problem re-emerges for my causally basic actions, for they too have results. As McCann notes:

> "if the appeal to causally more basic actions is ruled out, we must solve the action-result problem in these cases by different means." (p.456)

Obviously the relation of causal basicness solves the action-result problem only for actions of a 'higher level' than my causally basic actions. In this case we have no causally more basic actions; hence the need for a further principle to deal with these action-results. How then do the results of causally basic actions so qualify?

My answer bears some relation to McCann's response. In effect, these events qualify as the results of causally basic actions because they are caused by the agent's volition. This is not to say that they qualify as action-results in virtue of their being caused by a more basic action. Volition is not itself action, but is the key concept for understanding the nature of action. McCann accurately locates the solution to the action-result problem in volition, but viewing volition as action is more problematic than it is helpful.

We have already noted the unanswered questions that arise for McCann, given his assumption that volitions are actions. His position leaves him in a vacuum when it comes to saying how volitions and non-volitional actional thoughts qualify as actions. Obviously my alternative stance removes the first of these problems. In addition, the second is less of a problem. Non-volitional thoughts can qualify as actions if they are caused by volitions; which, since volitions are not actions, presents no worries about the causally basic status either of the volitions or the resultant thoughts.

Furthermore, the aforementioned puzzle of our non-volitional thoughts requiring volitional thoughts, is

dissolved if we apply the moral derived from our discussion of James's account of the will. Volitions are not introspectible, hence are not conscious thoughts.

Returning to my additional principle for solving the action-result problem: this is no more than the recognition that an event's being caused by a volition constitutes action. There is no need to regard volitions as actions in order to explain action-results. The bringing about of events by volition counts as action because of the 'special nature' of volition, not because volitions are actions.

On McCann's account, it is because volitions are actions that events they cause qualify as results, it is not because of the unique nature of volition, but because of the nature of action; which on this account remains a mystery.

As to why an event's being caused by volition should constitute action, I attribute this to the fact that volition is literally the 'putting into action' of our desires, beliefs and purposes. So, it is this fact that accounts for an event's being an action-result; if it is caused by volition. The key to understanding action-results, as well as the nature of action, is volition.

The special nature of volition is no more than that it renders subsequent events <u>actional</u>, without itself being action. This should not strike us as peculiar. After all, we know that the account of how events qualify as actions cannot repeatedly be in terms of earlier actions. Somewhere there has to be a resort to non-actions that nevertheless

account for the action-status of their effects. This is the appropriate role for volition, for it is not appropriate to treat volition as action.

(5) VOLITION AS NON-ACTION

Still, more must be said in support of treating volitions as non-actions. Certainly, earlier volition theories regarded volitions as actions (cf. my chapter on the 'traditional' account), in addition, McCann offers further comment in defence of this view. His main point being that

> "the explanatory power of the theory, a power not even approached by the alternatives usually offered, gives good reason for believing volition does indeed constitute the causally basic action occurring when actions that have results are performed." (op.cit., p.47Ø)

Despite this claim, we have seen that treating volition as action leaves more problems unsolved than does my alternative, which denies action-status to volitions. Consequently, on the basis of explanatory power we should opt for this latter account.

In fact McCann recognises this as a rival to his own view, and comments:

> "There would be little to object to the use of the term 'action' to cover only deeds that have results, provided this were understood to imply no more than that volition and other acts of thinking do not have them. But the danger is that it would be taken to imply much more: for example, that volition is not truly conduct, that it is not intentional, that we are not responsible for it,

> and that there is no sense at all in which volition is 'controlled'. But volition is conduct in all the usual senses and has all the characteristics usually taken as crucial to action, with the single exception that it lacks a result" (p.471).

In other words, McCann feels that the only possible grounds on which volition could be denied as action, is the fact that it has no result. But, I am denying more than this in deeming volition non-action.

I should not wish to deny that volition (or willing) is something one can be said to do, nor that in some sense it may be voluntary. This far, I agree with McCann, although he equates 'being voluntary' with 'being an action', as when he asks whether 'we should think of [volition] and other mental acts as not being voluntary, and hence not constituting action' (p.471).

In opposition to McCann, I suggest that volition can be voluntary yet not an action. It is true that voluntariness is essentially involved in action, but while voluntariness may be <u>evident</u> in action, it does not follow that whatever is voluntary is action. Thus, in cases of voluntary movement, such as my moving my arm, <u>the movement</u> can be classed as voluntary, and this would be in virtue of its being produced by the agent's volition. Yet the arm-movement is not my action, it is merely the action-result. The fact that this movement is not action does not imply that it is not voluntary; events which are not actions can be voluntary, hence, volitions, though voluntary, need not be actions.

In reply, McCann may argue that this is not the full-blooded sense of voluntariness that he wishes to apply to volition (and action). In this stronger sense of 'voluntary', volitions will be voluntary because they are under the control of the agent. This is the sense in which he 'performs' a willing.

Earlier, in the context of our discussion of Prichard, I disputed the view that volitions are actions and argued that one does not have 'control' over one's willing. Clearly, what one can control, one can do 'at will', but this is not applicable to volition. Volition is not something one can do _if one wills to do it_, for one cannot will to will! Hence, volition is not something one has 'in one's power'. Normally one can move arms, legs, head, tongue, and other parts of one's body, _at will_. These deeds, one can control; not volitions. So what of McCann's claim that volitions are intentional?

In an earlier paper, McCann explicates the notion of intentional doing:

> "What a person does is done intentionally provided it is done _with_ some intention. [Thus] ...when a person exerts himself to raise his arm, he exerts himself with the intention of raising his arm. This is signified by the 'to' in the description of the doing. 'He exerted himself to raise his arm, but did not exert himself with the intention of raising his arm', is self-contradictory." (McCann, 1972:243)

McCann would apply this to volition too. When one wills to raise one's arm, the 'to' indicates that the willing is performed _with the intention_ of raising one's arm. Thus, it

would be self-contradictory to say 'he willed to raise his arm, but he did not will with the intention of raising his arm.' Hence, willing is intentional; which proves that it is action.

The sense in which agents do things intentionally can be unpacked further by reference to the concept of 'teleological basicness', which McCann employs in the aforementioned article. In the case where Smith kills Jones by shooting him,

> "Smith will have performed the act of shooting Jones as a means to killing him. This would be especially so in cases where the killing is intentional... ...insofar as a person B's as a means to A-ing, his action B is viewed by him as ancillary to his action A; it occupies a place subordinate to A in his purposes, and is done by him with the intention of A-ing. Actions that are viewed in this way by their agents may be said to be teleologically more basic than the action to which they are considered ancillary." (pp.237-238)

From this it should be clear that if, when one wills to raise one's arm, the willing is intentional, it should be 'teleologically more basic' than the arm-raising. This is in keeping with McCann's account of intentional doing, and teleological basicness, such that, if not teleologically basic relative to another doing of the same agent, the deed cannot be intentional. This is important, for I shall suggest that ordinarily, willing would not qualify as teleologically basic, and that in consequence, it should not be construed as intentional.

To appreciate this, note the conditions McCann requires of the teleologically basic doing B. In particular, 'in so

far as a person B's as a means to A-ing, his action B is viewed by him as ancillary to his action A', and 'B occupies a place subordinate to A in [the agent's] purposes.' Thus, 'actions that are viewed in this way by their agents may be said to be teleologically more basic...' (my emphasis).

Clearly it is crucial to this concept of teleological basicness that the action construed as a means, be viewed as such by the agent himself, and form part of his purposes. If this is not the case, then not only will action B not be teleologically more basic than A, but B will fail to be intentional. For it is only when B is teleologically more basic than A that the agent can truly be said to do B in order to A.

We can apply this lesson to volitions. When one wills to raise one's arm, the willing is intentional, and is teleologically more basic than raising one's arm, only if one conceives of this willing as a means to raising one's arm, and the willing forms part of one's purposes. Is this ordinarily the case?

It seems to me that when one raises one's arm no thought is given to the processes required for this action. The average man-in-the-street does not have 'as part of his purposes', willing to raise his arm; this man has no conception of willing at all, for he ordinarily has no conception of doing anything as a means to raising his arm. Hence, willing is not ordinarily viewed in this light, and does not qualify as teleologically more basic than actions of arm-raising. Furthermore, willing cannot be construed as

intentional, for agents ordinarily have no conception of such a doing when they act.

We have still to respond to McCann's claim that when one wills to raise one's arm, the 'to' indicates that the willing is performed with the intention of raising one's arm. Remember that this view is substantiated with the claim that 'he willed to raise his arm, but he did not will with the intention of raising his arm', is self-contradictory. What we must appreciate is that there is a non-teleological sense in which one wills in order to act. This is simply the sense in which willing brings about the desired action-result. Thus, willing is required for arm-raising not teleologically, but causally. One cannot raise one's arm without the causally necessary conditions being satisfied. But one need not conceive of these conditions, view them as part of one's purposes, or even have an inkling of what they may be, in order to raise one's arm (in the teleological sense). Still, there is this clear sense (of causal necessity) in which one must will in order to raise one's arm. The following example may help us to appreciate that something's being required as a causal means does not make it a teleological means.

If I telephone my grandmother in Australia, I use the phone as a teleological means to speaking with her. Of course, unknown to me, this telephone call may require the use of sub-oceanic cables, which use is causally necessary for my conversation. There is a clear sense therefore, in which, if I am to speak to my grandmother, I must employ

these cables as a means. But it is equally clear that using such a means does not form part of my purposes, for I may be unaware of its existence, let alone its necessity. It follows that I do not employ the sub-oceanic cables as a teleological means to speaking with my grandparent, even though I use them as a causal means to this end.

From this we can appreciate that McCann's statement 'he willed to raise his arm, but did not will with the intention of raising his arm', is equivocal. If 'he willed to raise his arm' is interpreted teleologically then it implies that the willing was intentional. But we need not see willing as ever being a teleological means to anything. Hence, the appropriate interpretation of 'he willed to raise his arm' is in terms of causal necessity. The willing had to take place in order that the action be performed, but the willing does not figure in the agent's purposes. So, 'he willed to raise his arm, but did not will with the intention of raising his arm' is, properly understood, not self-contradictory, but invariably true. For the 'to' indicates a causal, not a teleological means to action, while 'with the intention of' indicates a teleological, not a causal means.

From this, it should be apparent that McCann's view of willing as intentional is not well-founded, furthermore, it is not counter to commonsense to deny this view of volition, for it is not denied that one wills in order to do whatever one does (in the action sense). Volition is not intentional, nor do we use volition as a teleological means to ordinary

action. This is in keeping with my account of volition as non-action.

Whether my view of volition is preferable to McCann's as a solution to the action-result problem may be assessed in one other respect. According to McCann, his approach is especially apt because 'it allows us to explain how the result of the less basic action... came to occur at all, and to explain it in terms of action on the part of the agent'. (p.455)

Obviously my account is equally able to explain how the results of basic actions come to occur; they occur because they are caused originally by the agent's volitions. But what of McCann's second consideration?

Since, on my view, volitions are not actions, it could be said that I do not explain the occurrence of action-results 'in terms of action on the part of the agent'. This comment seems fair when applied to actions I deem causally basic, for these actions have results that are not caused by earlier of the agent's actions. Instead, these results are caused by volitions.

While in an obvious sense, the occurrence of such results is not on my scheme explained in terms of the agent's actions, they are still placed in an action context. For bringing about such a result by volition <u>is</u> basic action, and it is volition that makes the context an actional one, even though volition is not itself action. Consequently, there is no drawback in the fact that some

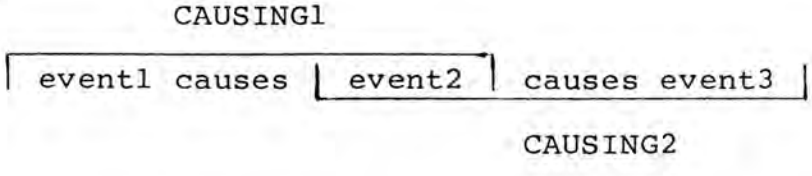
action-results are not caused by earlier actions of the agent. On the contrary, I have argued that this is advantageous from a theoretical viewpoint, since it enables us to explain much more than McCann's alternative.

(6) BASIC ACTION AND THE REGRESS ARGUMENT

Enough has been said to establish my alternative to McCann's account as an adequate response to the action-result problem. One major difficulty remains. The resultant account of basic action as the bringing about of an action-result by volition, bears close resemblance to the earlier rejected version derived from Davidson.

In that case, basic action was represented as a causing (of some event) which is not itself caused by any earlier of the agent's actions. As my account would have it, a basic action is the bringing about (causing) of some action-result (event) by volition (which is not an earlier action of the agent). Does this similarity mean that my version of basic action falls to the same regress that defeated Davidson's account? We must look again at figure 2.

figure 2



We are supposing that causing2 is the basic (or primitive) action. The regress argument presents its problem on the grounds that the relation holding between event2 and event3,

which is taken to render causing2 a basic action, is matched by the relation between event1 and event2. Hence, this relation should render causing1 a basic action too, and likewise for causingØ, before causing1. This, in essence, is the regress argument detailed earlier.

Fortunately, this regress argument is mistaken. The mistake is in supposing that causing2 counts as a basic or primitive action because event3 is produced other than by another action of the agent. Certainly, this is the basis of the primitive nature of causing2, but this fact alone does not establish its action status. The idea underlying primitive action is that it will be action not caused by any prior action of the same agent. Hence, the issue of whether a particular causing counts as action, is both distinct from, and logically prior to the question of its being a primitive action. From this, it follows that while, if causing1 (in figure 2) was an action this would disqualify causing2 from being primitive, the non-action status of causing1 does not disqualify causing2 either from being primitive or from being action.

Thus, even if the relation of event1 to event2 is the same as the relation of event2 to event3 (i.e. the latter is caused by an event other than an action), this does not imply that causing1 counts as primitive action if causing2 so qualifies. To think this, is to suppose that the action-status of causing2 (and not merely its primitive status) derives from the causal origins of event3. On the contrary, whether causing2 is an action is decided

independently of its being primitive. After all, it can only be primitive if it is an action, while it can be an action without being primitive.

Since we are able to supplement Davidson's account of primitive action, with a resort to volition which is not itself action, this will enables us to characterise those events which are causally basic, in a precise fashion. Specifically, actions are bringing things about, where this originates in volition, and causally basic actions are instances where the bringing about is done directly by volition.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to treat volition as fundamental to action generally, though not itself action. This enables us to resolve the action-result problem, provide an account of basic action, and in general terms, help to detail the nature of action itself.

Our next step is to consider how volition is related to the concept of trying, and whether 'trying' is itself important to the concept of action.

CHAPTER 7 : TRYING AND WILLING

(1) VOLITION AND EFFORT

Recently, some writers have suggested that a better understanding of the concept of trying sheds important light on the nature of action. (Davis, 1979; Gorr, 1979a; Hornsby, 1980; McCann, 1972, 1975; O'Shaughnessy, 1973.) Several major questions emerge about the relation of trying to action. One can ask whether every instance of action involves an instance of trying; whether tryings form a unique class of doings (bearing a special relation to instances of action); whether tryings are themselves actions; and whether tryings bear any relation to willing. In this chapter I shall propose answers to each of these questions. To begin, we might ask why we should suppose that the concept of trying is important.

In the first place, it may seem appealing to relate trying closely with willing. Thus, according to Reid, when we will to do a thing, 'the volition is accompanied with an effort to execute that which we willed' (Reid, p.63). And is 'trying' not synonymous with 'effort'? When one wishes to move a heavy rock it is necessary to exert some effort to achieve this end. Surely one's trying to move the rock consists in this effort?

One worry about this is that the effort involved in rock shifting is clearly physical in nature. It is muscular effort, going into pushing the obstacle. But is such

muscular effort the same thing as effort of will? The latter, one assumes, connotes something akin to concentration, or effort 'at the level of consciousness', rather than effort at the level of one's muscles. Yet, if we contrast this effort of will with physical effort, puzzles arise as to the nature of effort of will and also the relation it might bear to volition.

Reid is not illuminating on this relation, for he does not discuss the connection between volition and effort of will, although he appears to distinguish the two when he describes the latter as 'accompanying' the former. But if effort of will is not some physical exertion, what else could it be other than volition or will itself?

For William James, there is no distinction between effort of will and the volition itself. He thus resolves both of our puzzles with one answer: volitions <u>are</u> efforts of will. Our earlier discussion of James (Chapter 3) revealed a tripartite account of the will, but only two of these parts constitute volitional occurrences; the other part being 'simple ideo-motor action', which occurs with no 'express fiat' or 'volitional mandate'.

The two aspects of volition characterised by James are firstly, 'attending to the thought of one's movement' and secondly, 'express consent to the reality of what is attended to'. It is interesting to note that James also refers to these aspects respectively as 'the effort of attention' (p.562), and 'the effort to consent' (p.568). Thus, both types of volitional occurrence are described as

'states of effort' (p.568). Hence, the volition is the effort.

An apparently similar equation of volition with effort is adopted by Prichard in his 'Duty and ignorance of fact' (Prichard, 1949a). Here, Prichard represents willing as 'setting oneself' or 'exerting oneself' to do something (p.32ff).

The significance of such alleged identity between willing and exertion or effort to our present inquiry lies in the fact that 'making an effort to do something' or 'exerting oneself to do it', seem synonymous with 'trying' to do that thing. So we can see James and Prichard as (tacitly) identifying willing with trying.

Before elaborating further on the notion of trying per se, we may ask why we should think of willing or volition as a species of effort. In James's case, the answer is easily grasped, for his account of the operation of the will is almost mechanistic in conception. The fundamental variety of voluntary movement is simple ideo-motor action, in which movements result directly from our 'naturally impulsive' thoughts of such movements. Actual volitional occurrences are only required when there is some resistance to the impulsive nature of our thoughts. Thereby, the role of volition is that of overcoming such resistance, and how is resistance overcome but by effort? Since volitions fulfil this function, James reasonably construes them as 'strokes of effort'.

On the other hand, Prichard's reasons for treating volition as 'exerting oneself' to do something are not apparent, although he is unhappy about the 'artificiality' of the term 'will', when applied to the special activity one performs in action (op. cit., p.33). In Prichard's later work he reverts to talk of 'willing' in preference to 'setting oneself' and 'exerting oneself'.

There does seem to be some rationale for the equation of willing with effort and thereby, with trying. Certainly, if we must will in order to do any action then even if we fail to do what we wish, we have made an effort to do it, in the willing. This surely counts as <u>trying</u> to do the action in question.

Yet, given this plausibility, the identification is not straightforward. We noted earlier that not all effort is readily viewed as 'effort of will'. If it is at the physical or muscular level it seems to be the wrong sort of effort altogether. But does this damage the claim that willings are efforts, and thereby, tryings?

It certainly indicates that if willings are to be regarded as efforts they can only be a <u>species</u> of effort, for it is clearly implausible to construe physical efforts as acts of will. So, even if every willing is some sort of effort, not every effort is a willing. Similarly, this reflects on the relation of willing to trying. My physical effort to move the rock is not my effort of will, yet may reasonably be described as my trying to move the rock. Hence, even if every willing is a trying, not all tryings

are willings.

So long as we are prepared to support a Jamesian view of the operation of willing, the picture of volitions as strokes of effort is apt, but since James's account has already been considered and dismissed, we cannot plausibly continue to regard volitions as, literally, efforts of will. The only remaining justification for deeming volition a stroke of effort would involve an extension of the meaning of 'effort' or 'exertion'. In other words, calling volition a stroke of effort, or an effort of will, can only be a metaphorical use of the term. Thereby, its logic should not lead us to seek anything on a par with physical effort or exertion.

In response, it may still be said that willing is effort of will, because it requires or involves mental concentration and exertion in order to achieve the desired end. Thus, in attempting a complicated long-division with pencil and paper, one is likely to experience just such concentration and effort. An effort of will is precisely what is required to overcome the difficulty one encounters in such tasks, hence volition is exertion of will.

The first trouble with this view is that not all actions involve such an experience of effort or intense concentration. This is precisely what led James to suppose that only some actions require a volitional occurrence. But we have seen the problem this leaves; how can non-willed movements qualify as voluntary? It is quite likely that one can perform less complicated long-divisions with no feeling

of effort or concentration. Yet we should not say that such calculations are unwilled. Consequently, whatever we may occasionally feel in acting, is no sure guide to the intrinsic nature of action as such. Since this association of effort does not lead us far in understanding either willing or trying, it may help to consider an apparently paradigm example of both trying and willing.

(2) TRYING AND FAILING

In the case of a patient with an anaesthetised or paralysed arm (such as cited by James, op. cit., p.105) we may suppose that he both wills and tries to raise his desensitised arm, although no limb movement may result. Indeed, if this patient is blindfolded and asked to raise his arm he may believe that he has complied with the request, although his arm fails to rise. It is difficult to explain the patient's mistaken belief if we do not suppose that he succeeded in doing something. So it is plausible to suggest that he willed his arm to rise, and thereby tried to raise it, but did not succeed because of the effect of anaesthesia on his arm muscles. In this way, his willing his arm to rise, and thereby, his trying to raise it, may lead him to believe that he has done what was asked of him. Certainly, he appears to have done all that would ordinarily be required of him in order to raise his arm, and he is unable to tell that the arm does not rise, because he can neither see nor feel the limb in question. So, if he knows that he has done all that is normally required in order to raise his arm, and cannot know that his arm does not

respond, it is natural that he will believe himself to have raised the arm. He has reason to believe it will rise, and no reason to suppose it does not.

In such an instance, we seem to have the action of arm raising minus the arm rising. So we might expect to shed light on Wittgenstein's query as to what remains when we subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm (Wittgenstein, 1953: I, para.621).

On first view it is tempting to say that the patient raises his arm only it does not go up. But this will not do. An arm raising without an arm rising is as logically absurd as an omelette without eggs. In each case, the latter is a logically necessary condition for the former. Instead, in reply to Wittgenstein's question we may propose that what remains upon subtraction of the arm rising is the agent's willing his arm to rise, and his trying to raise his arm. Of course it is not yet clear whether this would be one thing or two, but we may suppose that in willing his arm to rise the patient thereby tries to raise his arm.

Godfrey Vesey has considered various replies to Wittgenstein's query (Vesey, 1961; page references to Gustafson, 197Ø). In particular, he details three possibilities as to what is left over upon subtraction of the arm rising:

(i) the patient tried to move his arm.

(ii) the patient did whatever would ordinarily have

produced the movement, and

(iii) the patient willed the movement to occur.

Curiously, Vesey is unhappy with all of these replies. This is surprising because all appear apposite in the envisioned context. If the patient had not done something that might be considered trying to move his arm, why should he be surprised upon learning that his arm had not risen? Since he was surprised, we suppose that he believed he had raised his arm, and this belief is explained if we attribute to the patient some doing other than raising his arm, that we can describe as his trying to raise his arm.

Also, it appears that the arm would have risen if only the anaesthesia had been absent. Hence, we should suppose that all other conditions for the action were satisfied. In other words, the patient must have done what would ordinarily have produced the arm rising.

Both of these suppositions lead us to seek some doing that we may identify as the agent's trying to raise his arm, and as his doing what would ordinarily produce the arm movement. The most plausible candidate is his volition. If he willed his arm to rise this would ordinarily result in the arm movement. His willing may be understood as an attempt on his part to raise his arm, and, furthermore, as usually understood, willing would give the patient the 'feeling of agency'. This would explain his false belief that he had raised his arm.

Why then does Vesey reject such replies? In his view, it is unsatisfactory to say the agent's trying is left over, since he may be unaware of any difficulty in raising his arm (op. cit., p.43). If the patient experiences no resistance to his arm moving, how can we say that he had to try to move it? As Vesey puts it:

> "from the patient's point of view it is not as if he had to try to move his hand, but as if he could actually, and easily, move it..." (p.43)

So, the patient cannot have tried to raise his arm unless he met with some resistance, and thereby failed.

There is no doubt that the subject in question experienced no resistance to his moving his arm, but does this entitle us to conclude that he did not try? We commonly distinguish occasions when something can be achieved without difficulty from others where obstacles or resistance preclude success. Ordinarily, we would say that in cases of the former type, the objective is achieved without having to try. While, in the latter type of case, we would say that the agent could only try, since the obstacles were not surmountable. Granted this conventional usage, Vesey's comments are appropriate, for talk of trying ordinarily indicates the presence of known difficulty or resistance to the proposed action. But this is not all there is to trying.

(3) A SECOND MODEL FOR TRYING

In response to Vesey's rejection of trying, Robert Imlay argues that there is a second model for trying, not

acknowledged by Vesey, which he believes to be a correct answer to Wittgenstein's query (Imlay, 1967). As Imlay puts it:

> "Vesey's argument... would be conclusive only if trying to do something had to be accompanied by an awareness of empirical obstacles on the part of the person who is trying. And although this is true in terms of the model of trying to which efforts of will conform, it is not true in terms of the model of trying where saying that someone has tried is just a more positive way of saying that he has not succeeded in doing what he set out to do." (p.125)

This conception of trying 'bridges the gap between what a person thinks he is doing and the fact that he is doing nothing' (loc. cit.). Indeed, Imlay describes it as an ad hoc device to suit just this purpose. Furthermore, on this model, the trying need not involve any doing.

So, according to Imlay, we can describe the anaesthetised patient as trying to raise his arm, but this is not to ascribe any doing in which the trying consists, for to say that he tried is to say merely that he did not achieve what he set out to do. There are, however, several worrying aspects to Imlay's position.

Firstly, as Imlay himself notes,

> "the question arises... as to how, if trying is not a doing, we are to distinguish between... [our] patient and the person who dissociates himself right from the start from the experiment..." (p.126)

How do we differentiate between two subjects where

neither raises their arm, but only one is anaesthetised? Supposing the first does not raise his arm solely because of the anaesthesia, whereas the other does not raise his arm through lack of interest in doing so. Can we describe both as trying to raise their arm? Presumably, this ascription applies only to the patient whose arm is paralysed. Yet does this trying not consist in something he does? Is this not what differentiates his case from that of his apathetic companion? Imlay has the following response:

> "Any sense of strangeness there might be is... dispelled once we concentrate not so much on the fact that the two people did not raise their arm but on the fact that James' patient failed to raise it while the other person in effect refused to raise it. For this difference... reflects their fundamental difference in attitude toward the experiment." (p.126)

To this, he adds that 'it is the positive attitude of James' patient towards the experiment as much as anything else that leads us to say that he tried and failed to raise his arm...' (loc. cit.).

This is an odd state of affairs, for it is alleged that the attitude of the patient toward the task he is asked to do, combined with the fact that he is unable to comply with the request, render it appropriate to say that he tried and failed. But suppose our patient realises that his arm is not rising because of the anaesthesia, and knows also that its effects are short-lived. Thereby, he might continue to try to raise his arm at regular intervals in the belief that he will eventually be successful.

While there is nothing odd in this scenario it presents peculiar difficulties for Imlay's notion of trying. In the first place, since describing the patient as trying requires some pro-attitude on his part, it is difficult to see what trying at regular intervals would amount to. Must we suppose that the patient only ceases to try when he ceases to maintain his favourable attitude toward raising his hand, and thereby tries once more when this attitude returns? Surely, his pro-attitude toward raising his arm may obtain throughout the duration of the anaesthesia; in which case, he would not cease trying for an instant. Furthermore, such favourable attitudes need not be within the patient's control. Just as he might grow depressed and unable to work up enthusiasm for the doctor's experiments, likewise, he may find himself unaccountably well-disposed to having his arm go up when requested to raise it. Oddly, this would render his trying to raise his arm outwith his control.

In addition, there is a second, and perhaps more peculiar consequence of Imlay's position. If the patient in the above scenario only tries in Imlay's sense, he will never succeed in raising his arm, for this trying is not doing anything. And if the patient does nothing as an attempt to raise his arm, we should not expect success. Yet we know for sure that if he genuinely persists in trying to raise his arm, it will eventually rise. He will eventually be successful. This surely indicates the absurdity of Imlay's account of trying, for on this view trying to raise the arm is not doing anything, but attempting to raise one's arm by doing nothing cannot possibly succeed. Indeed, its

success is logically precluded. A trying that cannot succeed is absurd (cf. Margolis, 1960:96-7; McCormick and Thalberg, 1967:43-4). Hence, either our patient cannot try to raise his paralysed arm or his trying to do so must consist in some doing which might (logically) be successful.

Although Imlay claims that our patient performs no doing when he tries (and fails) to raise his arm, the incoherence of this view is implicit in the manner in which it is expressed. Thus, 'saying that someone tried is just a more positive way of saying that he has not succeeded in doing what he set out to do' (p.125). But if this trying involves no doing, what can we describe as the agent's 'setting out' to raise his arm? Again, it is only when there is something which can be so described that it makes sense to say that the agent failed, or did not succeed in what he set out to do.

Imlay's account of trying will not stand as a response to the Wittgenstinian query, for if the patient does nothing then he does not try to raise his arm. This is reflected in Imlay's inability to explain the patient's belief that he raised his arm. How is this accounted for, on the supposition that he did nothing?

There is however, one important lesson to be drawn from Imlay's stance against Vesey, for he is correct in that Vesey's argument is conclusive only if trying has to be accompanied by an awareness of some resistance on the part of the agent (p.125). Although Imlay fails to provide a coherent alternative account of trying; one which lacks this

feature of perceived resistance; there may yet be such a trying.

(4) OMNIPRESENT TRYING

Although we ordinarily speak of someone trying when we actually anticipate resistance to their achieving what they set out to do, or, generally, when we have doubts about the likelihood of their success, this may not preclude the possibility that one tries whenever one performs any action. Thus, Brian O'Shaughnessy argues that the possibility of 'divergent cognitive attitudes' toward any proposed action makes it appropriate to describe agents who are themselves neither in doubt nor difficulty over the success of their intended actions, as trying to do what they intend (O'Shaughnessy, 1973:365-8).

By 'divergent cognitive attitudes' is meant simply the possibility that someone (not necessarily the agent) may have reason to doubt the likely success of the agent's enterprise. What is important about this argument is that the mere possibility of doubt on anyone's part renders it appropriate to describe agents as trying whenever they perform an action, or set out to do so. The force of the argument is put succinctly by Hugh McCann, in denying that one tries only if one sets out and fails, or an obstacle is present, or the agent has doubts about his likely success:

> "The trouble with this is that the third disjunct can be satisfied in an onlooker, who has nothing to do with the attempt. If I am the only one who doubts that you can touch your toes, I can

> correctly say you will try to do so. But you are the only one who tries; trying is something you do. And what an agent does cannot be a function of how a mere onlooker happens to view the proceedings." (McCann, 1975:425)

Hence, the possibility of doubt with respect to any intended action, indicates the presence of trying, as something the agent does. (cf. also Gorr, 1979a:243ff; Davis, 1979:16ff; and Hornsby, 1980:33ff; all of whom detail arguments akin to the above.)

If we are thus able to conclude that trying is always present whenever one acts or sets out to act, does this enlighten us in the context of our anaesthetised patient? Certainly we may reject Vesey's misgivings over describing this patient as trying to raise his arm, but are we yet entitled to apply this ascription? After all, it is not clear that the subject is able to do anything about raising his arm, so why should we say that he can try?

It seems that this ascription will only be appropriate if we can locate some doing of the subject which is reasonably seen as a trying on his part, to raise his arm. If he were totally paralysed and unable to exert any physical effort whatever toward moving his arm, this might be taken as indicative of his inability not merely to raise his arm, but also an inability to try to do so.

This is the view adopted by Richard Taylor (Taylor, 1966:82ff) who feels that

> "if there is nothing whatever... a man can do in

> the way of trying to move his... [arm]- if he is as helpless with respect to this as the rest of us are with respect, say, to suddenly reducing our bulk to that of an acorn- then it would be idle to insist that he might nevertheless at least try." (p.83)

Still, we might wish to describe our patient as able to will his arm to move. In which case, this willing might be construed as trying to raise the arm, even if it produces no physical response in the patient's body. After all, if he is unable to try to raise his arm, it is difficult to see how he could discover this disability. Supposing him able to will the arm movement, and thus able to try, would enable the patient to learn that his arm is paralysed through his failure to raise his arm. Taylor, however, sees no need to resort to willing as trying. Thus:

> "If one insisted that he was trying to open a door, and it was apparent that he was performing no bodily action at all- grasping nothing, exerting no effort, and so on- then he could not be telling the truth. If he said that <u>all</u> he was doing was 'just trying', that is, trying without actually doing anything except just mentally trying, then at best his 'trying' would consist only of <u>concentrating</u> on the door, perhaps <u>wishing</u> it might open, or vividly <u>imagining</u> it opening... But no mental doings of this kind can count as trying to do anything." (p.81)

As to how our patient finds out that his arm will not move, Taylor points out that

> "no one ever <u>learned</u> that he could not wiggle his hair by <u>trying</u> and failing; yet we do certainly know this. It cannot be maintained, then, that no one <u>could</u> know this, <u>unless</u> he had tried and failed- for no one has ever tried it, and no one even knows how to try it, and yet everyone <u>does</u> know that he cannot do it." (loc. cit.)

Apparently, this is Taylor's response to the argument that the patient must be capable of trying to raise his arm if he is able to learn that it is paralysed. After all, if he can learn of his inability to do something, without having first to try and fail, then there is no compulsion to believe that the patient must be able to try to raise his arm, if he is to learn of his reduced capacity for arm moving. But this response depends upon treating our paralysed arm example as on a par with Taylor's hair wiggling. Are these similar cases of learning without the need for trying?

According to Taylor they are. He maintains that we know that we cannot wiggle our hair and do not discover this by trying and failing, and that the paralysed man 'knows in the same way that he cannot move his... [arm]', he just finds that he cannot do it (p.84). This naturally leads us to ask how the subject 'finds' out that he cannot raise his arm. Taylor's response?

> "How he finds out is again beside the point; we need not in any case, suppose that he finds it out from something else that he finds, namely, from the failure of his... effort of trying." (loc. cit.).

Taylor claims that our paralysed subject does not find out that his arm will not rise by trying to raise it and inferring from the fact that it does not go up. Instead, he just knows that it will not move, as he knows that his hair will not wiggle at his command. But this analogy is far from

plausible. If the patient makes no inference from a trying, then should he not be aware that his arm is paralysed the instant this is so? Yet experiments indicate that subjects can be mistaken in thinking that their arm operates normally when it is in fact paralysed.

Clearly, the patient need not know of his inability until asked to raise his arm by the experimenter. Does he not thereupon infer his paralysis from his failure to raise his arm?

Of course, we must locate this trying as some doing of the subject. In this respect, Taylor is correct in noting that 'trying to do one thing consists of actually doing something else' (p.81). Again, the most plausible response is to suppose that the patient's trying to raise his arm consists in his willing the arm to rise.

(5) WILLING BUT NOT TRYING?

An unusual alternative to this view is advocated by Michael Gorr in his article 'Willing, trying and doing' (Gorr, 1979a). Although he is unhappy with Taylor's approach to the problem, Gorr does accept that the patient may not try to raise his arm, in order to discover his paralysis. Instead,

> "The paralytic acquires knowledge of his paralysis by discovering his inability even to try to move his body; this inability he in turn discovers by observing that his willing to move his body fails to result in the kinaesthetic sensations characteristic of trying. The paralytic's knowledge, in other words, is the

> result not of an inference from an unsuccessful trying, but of an inference from an unsuccessful willing." (p.247)

But why should we separate trying from willing? Gorr's position is the result of a thesis he defends in the aforementioned paper, viz:

> (i) 'Trying consists in the muscular activity required for bodily movement.' (p.246)

Obviously, if we construe trying to make a bodily movement as the activation of appropriate muscles, since such activity is ruled out when one's arm is paralysed, trying to raise one's arm under such circumstances is also precluded. So it is in keeping with Gorr's position that our patient could not learn of his paralysis through trying.

Nevertheless, while Gorr's view that performing the muscular activity required for bodily movement amounts to trying to move one's body, is entirely plausible, it does not entail that such muscular exertion is all that might constitute trying. So, when Gorr suggests that the patient learns of his paralysis through unsuccessful willing, why not suppose that such willing (in the absence of muscular activity), is trying to raise his arm? Although this willing is not a trying on Gorr's conception of trying, there is no obvious reason for denying this status to volition, as well as to the muscular activity required for bodily movements.

Gorr's reason for declining this option is easily found, for as well as thesis (i), above, he also maintains that

> (ii) 'we cannot coherently identify volitions with doings of any sort.' (p.247)

Given the fact that, as Gorr agrees, tryings are doings, if volitions are not doings, then they cannot be tryings.

Volition is understood by Gorr to be

> "a mental event that functions to bring about the occurrence of things we can be said to do and thereby, explains the intentionality or purposiveness that distinguishes a doing from a mere happening." (p.246)

It is for this reason that he does not wish to construe willing as a doing. If it is to be used to explicate the notion of a doing, then volition cannot itself be a doing. Gorr regards doings as events appropriately related to volitions, hence volitions themselves may not be done.

Obviously, if tryings are doings and volitions are not, then willing cannot be trying. So Gorr details the paralysed patient as learning that his arm is immobilised through willing it to move, not through trying to move it. Thus, according to Gorr the patient will appreciate not only that he cannot raise his arm but also that he is unable to try to raise it. This is in keeping with his account of trying as muscular activity.

Nevertheless, there are two aspects to Gorr's story that give cause for concern. In the first place, it seems peculiar that our patient can discover his paralysis by willing if this willing is not something he does. Does this

mean that the patient has to wait around for the appropriate volition to happen, before he is able to appreciate that it does not have its usual effect? Surely, if he is capable of discovering his paralysis he can do so by instigating a test, rather than waiting for an opportune happening, which would be his willing the arm to rise?

The second worrying feature of Gorr's account is that it seems to exclude the possibility of trying to contract one's muscles. After all, if trying consists in the muscular activity necessary for bodily movement, this entails that one can only try to do what requires muscular activity as a means. Clearly, contracting one's muscles is not something one does by contracting one's muscles, hence, according to Gorr, one cannot try to do such a thing.

In response, Gorr may say that there are varieties of trying other than that involving muscular activity. Thus, one can try to open a door by charging it with a shoulder. But muscular activity would count as the fundamental (or perhaps, causally basic) species of trying. So, how would one contract one's muscles?

A likely response is that one might try to activate, say, one's arm muscles, by moving one's arm. While initially plausible, this is problematic. In order that I try to contract my arm muscles it is not necessary that I succeed. So, if trying to contract them may consist in moving my arm, I do not have to succeed in moving the arm in order to have tried to contract my arm muscles. So long as I have done something that amounts to trying to move my arm, in order to

contract my arm muscles, then I have tried to contract those muscles. Thus, while I may try to contract them by moving my arm, it is not necessary that I move it. I could try to contract the arm muscles by trying to move my arm. But then, in what would trying to move my arm consist?

If I may try to contract my muscles by trying to move my arm, and trying to move the arm is nothing more than activity of the appropriate muscles, then trying to contract one's muscles would ultimately consist in contracting those very muscles. This is the view that Gorr's approach leads to; this is a view that I take to be paradoxical.

If I can only try to Ø by Ø-ing, this means that I can never try and fail, for here, trying to do one thing does not consist in doing something else, which is contrary to the logic of trying.

We see therefore that the result of Gorr's thesis (i) is that one could not try to contract one's muscles; unless there is something more fundamental than muscular activity that could be employed as means to this end. The natural candidate is willing. But this possibility is excluded by Gorr's thesis (ii). Given that we should wish to retain the possibility of trying to contract one's muscles, at least one of Gorr's theses has to be rejected.

Surely the most plausible move is to allow that trying to contract one's muscles, as well as trying to do other things, may consist in willing them. Yet this means not only that Gorr's thesis (ii) must go but also his thesis (i). In

other words, if one may try to contract one's muscles by willing them to contract, this entails the falsity of

(i) Trying consists in muscular activity.

and

(ii) We cannot identify volitions with doings of any sort.

The second of these theses must also be rejected because willing can only be trying, if it is also a doing. Does this mean in consequence, that volition cannot serve to explicate the concept of a doing, as Gorr fears?

I believe Gorr is confused on this point too, for there may be scope for a distinction between things we do that are actions, and things we do that are not. In this case, we might construe willing as a non-actional doing, and employ it in explicating the concept of action (the other sort of doing). Of course, this depends upon the viability of such a distinction. I shall attempt to demonstrate its plausibility.

(6) TRYING AS ACTION

In 'Trying, paralysis and volition' (McCann, 1975), Hugh McCann argues that 'to try is to engage in action, and indeed in action that is necessarily intentional' (p.430). He lists four reasons for supposing trying to be not merely a doing, but action:

(1) Trying is not a passive occurrence, but something we do.

(2) It is something we know we do, when we do it.

(3) Trying is something we are held responsible for doing or not doing.

(4) Trying is always intentional; one who tries always acts with the intention of doing what he is said to try to do. (pp.430-1)

In summing up, McCann notes that, 'if all this is true, then trying has all the earmarks of intentional action. Hence, we can only conclude that even in cases of paralysis, to try to act is to act intentionally (p.432).

We have already seen that McCann regards volition as action, it is natural therefore, that in equating trying with willing he should construe trying as action. He is almost correct. This seems to put me in a difficult position since I have opposed the view that to will is to act, yet I accept that willing is a form of trying. Can these two theses be compatible?

In order to demonstrate that my overall position is not only coherent but preferable to that adopted by McCann, we must consider the claim that trying is always action. For this is where McCann goes wrong.

McCann's first pointer to the action-status of trying,

is the claim that trying is always something we do, and not a passive occurrence (p.430). What is not clear to me is that this forms a comprehensive dichotomy; with doings that are actions (hence, active) on the one hand, and mere occurrences that are not actions (hence, passive), on the other. The trouble with this classification is that all doings are classified as intentional in nature, which they are not. Furthermore, the non-intentional doings, which I shall detail, are distinct from other occurrences aptly described as 'passive'.

To understand my conception of non-actional, non-intentional doings, we must return to the notion of trying. When one tries to do something, this trying always consists in doing something other than that which one tries to do. Thus, if I try to close the door by shoving it with my knee, my trying consists in the means I employ to secure what I wish to achieve, in this case, shoving the door with my knee. But from our discussion of basic action we learned that there are at least two ways of classifying the means that we employ in doing things. Thus, my shoving the door may be a teleological means to closing the door; it will also be employed as a causal means to this end. Clearly, being a means of either type is compatible with being a means of the other type. As in the above example, where my shoving the door with my knee is (ordinarily) both a teleological and a causal means to closing the door.

The principal difference between these two sorts of means is of crucial significance. Something can only be a

teleological means if it is conceived of by the agent as part of his plan for achieving his goal (cf. McCann, 1972:235-249). In this sense, my shoving the door is a teleological means, because I shove the door with the intention of closing the door. From our earlier discussion of willing as a means, we know that volition is a causal means to bodily movement, but not a teleological means (see previous chapter). Since willing is ordinarily not something agents are aware of doing, it cannot form part of their purposes in the sense required of a teleological means. Nevertheless, volition still stands as something employed as a means to bodily movement, and, for that matter, as a means to muscular activity. I submit therefore that willing is something the agent does (in the sense of causal means) in order to contract his muscles or move his body. Furthermore, there is no reason why this doing should not count as trying to do the thing in question.

To summarise the recent arguments: we have considered and rejected Gorr's suggestion that our paralysed patient wills his arm to rise, without trying to raise it. Despite Gorr's attempts to equate trying with muscular activity, there is every reason to suppose that if our patient can will his arm to move, he can thereby try to move it. This is especially so, since willing can plausibly be understood as something one does. Despite Gorr's fears over this admission we are still able to employ the concept of volition in explicating the difference between actions and other events, for while it is a doing, volition is not an action.

Against McCann, I have argued that willing as a doing, can be a trying without being intentional. It can be viewed as a trying because it is always employed as a causal means to bodily movements; it is not intentional because it is never employed as a teleological means to such movements.

In effect, I contend that there are two types of trying (as there are two types of means). Only trying which involves some teleological means will be intentional; only such a trying will be action. Thus far I have met two of McCann's four pointers to the action-status of trying. These are (1) trying is always a doing, and (4) trying is always intentional. My response has been, firstly, that willing is a doing; but for that, not action. Secondly, that not all trying is intentional, for it may involve use of a causal but not a teleological means. This describes willing, hence willing is trying without acting.

Before moving on to consider McCann's remaining two pointers, more must be said in defence of my claim that the doing one performs in willing can count as a trying. The objection I envisage is that calling the use of a causal means 'trying' is an extension of the meaning of this term, for by 'trying' we mean the use of a teleological means. How can willing be trying if the agent who wills is not even aware that he has done so? Can I be trying to do something without appreciating in what my trying consists?

This is an important criticism of my account of willing as trying. Indeed, a similar line of attack may be directed against my claim that willing is a doing: is it compatible

with willing being a doing, that the agent is not conscious of willing?

But is there reason to think that trying must always be the use of some teleological means? We already know that I can telephone my grandmother in Australia by using sub-oceanic cables as a causal means. If, perchance, I am unable to connect with my grandparent, would not my trying include all that went into getting a telephone to ring in Darwin? In which case, at least in part, my trying to contact my grandmother involved the use of submarine telephone links of whose existence I was totally ignorant; having assumed that Telstar or its second cousin would be used to make the link. If this is so, then trying may consist in the use of a causal means which is not a teleological means to my goal. It appears to me that to insist further that trying must involve teleological means, is to fall back on verbal stipulation.

What then of my claim that willing is a doing? Once again it is tempting to insist that to be a doing something must form part of our conscious purposes. But it is readily seen that sending electromagnetic signals over vast distances is something I did in telephoning Australia. Yet I did not consciously set out to do anything with electromagnetic waves. I need not have met the concept before, but transmitting such a signal is certainly something I did, whether I was aware of it or not. Consequently, there is precedent for describing our use of any causal means as something we do. Since willing has been

defended as such a causal means, willing is therefore doing.

The remaining pointers to the action-status of trying that McCann details, are

(2) It is something we know that we do, when we do it,

and,

(3) Trying is something we are held responsible for doing or not doing.

The first of these was looming in the background when we considered the view that trying must always be the use of a teleological means. There, we asked whether volition could count as trying, if we are not conscious of willing. Surely, we are always aware when we try to do something that we are trying to do it? Does this not prove that to will is not to try?

While I may be unaware of all that my trying involves, I cannot fail to appreciate that I am trying. So, if I am not aware of willing, how can this count as trying? McCann is correct in noting that we generally know, when we are trying to do something, that we are trying. He adds that

> "our knowledge of what we are trying to do is precisely the special kind of knowledge that is normal for an agent engaging in intentional, overt action." (op. cit., p.430)

A solution to this difficulty is to be found in a further significant feature of volition, for it is the presence of

volition in action that explains the agent's awareness of acting. But what this means has to be carefully understood, for it does not imply awareness of volition, as such, nor does it preclude the possibility of non-actional trying.

In this vein, Lawrence Davis has suggested that agent's awareness of acting should be explained by postulating volitions (Davis, 1979). He represents volition as

> "an event which is normally the cause of the agent's belief that he is acting in a certain way, and which normally causes such doing-related events that make it true that he is acting in that way." (p.16)

In this way, since actions always involve volition, we can understand the agent's knowledge that he is acting in terms of the presence of volition. His willing not only causes muscular activity or bodily movements, but, as part of its nature, leads the agent to believe that he is active.

Effectively, when an agent wills, he feels that he has done something. But this is not to say that he feels the volition. Since the awareness derives from volition, if the agent wills but this willing , unknown to him, fails to take effect. he may well believe that he has done more than he has in fact done. This is why our paralysed patient believes (falsely) that he has raised his arm. He wills to raise his arm, and he is unable to appreciate that his arm does not move. Certainly, he is aware of doing something, but he is mistaken as to what it is. He also knows what he was trying to do, viz. raise his arm. And there is no doubt that he, at least, tried to raise his arm. What he did was to will; this

willing was his attempt at arm-moving.

So, contrary to what McCann contends, agent's awareness of trying is not always indicative of his having acted, although usually this is so. This awareness is not a characteristic of actions, but of doings. Usually when he wills, the agent's volition has some effect and in such a case we have action. But when he tries to perform some action, and this trying consists only in his willing, he is nevertheless conscious of having done something. It is because he has done something that he has this awareness; he need not have acted. The willing is a doing, and as such has the same agent-awareness one expects from action; the awareness is due to volition, whether or not it has any bodily effects; whether or not it is part of an action. The presence of this awareness is no accurate guide to what one has done, and does not indicate that willing is action. It is the nature of willing that explains the 'feeling' of being active; which is why we think of ourselves as doing something, though it may be no more than willing.

All of this means that McCann's pointer (2), that trying is something that we know that we do when we do it, is true, but does not show that trying is always action. Trying may consist in a doing that results in agent-awareness, but is yet not an action; such is volition. We are left with McCann's third pointer:

> (3) Trying is something we are held responsible for doing.

Again, this is always true where the trying consists in using something as a teleological means. But is this true of willing as trying? There is reason to think that it is. But to get this fact in perspective we have to look again at the structure of action. We know that we are held responsible for the actions we perform, so, if I make a rude gesture to a traffic warden this is likely to be laudable or despicable, as something I do. Similarly, I may be criticised (or praised) for trying to make a rude gesture. (I may fail because I am in France where the conventions for rude gesturing are different.) Clearly, it is not necessary that one's actions succeed in order to evoke praise or blame. But why should trying be thus subject? It is not that what the trying consists in is, in itself, laudable or reprehensible, for it may be totally innocuous. Rather, it is seen as part of what goes into doing a reprehensible or laudable action. In the same way, since willing is part of what is involved in any action, and since, like actions, it is a product of the agent's aims, desires and beliefs, it may be subject to praise and blame. Ordinarily, if I will my arm to rise, then I set out to raise it. I am as much responsible for this as for actually raising my arm. But does this mean that willing must be an action? The short answer is, 'no'. We may be held responsible not only for the actions we perform, but for the sort of things we are inclined to do. Thus, in the case where I tried to be rude, I may be blamed for having such an inclination, not because of what I actually did. Indeed, there is every reason to

suppose that I would be blamed (or at least criticised) for willing to do such a thing. Not because this willing is a type of action worthy of praise or blame, but because it represents a move on my part to do an action which is so worthy.

So, willing is something for which we may be held responsible, as we may be with anything that indicates the sort of things we are inclined to do, but this does not mean that willing must be action, for as a species of trying it is obviously part of what is involved in acting, hence our responsibility for it.

We see therefore, that McCann is wrong in construing every trying as action. Willing can count as trying, be something the agent does, and be something he is held responsible for doing. Also, in willing, he will know that he is doing something (though he may not know precisely what he is doing). These facts do not show that willing is intentional nor that it must count as action.

Before concluding our present discussion, we have to consider one further thesis about trying, which is that tryings have a special status with respect to performing any action.

(7) TRYING AS CONATION

At least two writers have proffered the view that tryings are conceptually fundamental to action; that we should understand action in terms of its structure as

involving trying. Brian O'Shaughnessy contends that

> "when a man intentionally raises his arm, the following happens. His arm rises; he tries to raise his arm; and the latter event causes, along acceptable bodily paths, the physical event of arm rising." (O'Shaughnessy, 1973:383)

He believes that 'an inner phenomenon... [of trying] is a permanent constituent of physical action' (p.367). Jennifer Hornsby agrees that tryings have such a special status, and she characterises actions as 'tryings to move the body or bring about bodily movements' (Hornsby, 1980:45). For both of these writers trying is a 'substitute' for the traditional concept of volition, in other words, tryings are conations (cf. Hornsby, p.47).

This is a view that I do not endorse, for there is nothing special about tryings as there is about willing. Thus, pushing a door, firing a rocket, and even, willing can all be tryings. All qualify as tryings for similar reasons, but describing them thus tells us nothing about the nature of such events. McCann has this matter in correct perspective, as when he notes that 'trying'

> "never names a unique species of action, but rather functions always as a general name for the business of going about... [some] performance..." (McCann, 1975:436)

Thus, 'we speak of trying only when we have occasion to distinguish this business from the actual complete performance of an act' (loc. cit.).

Of course, we might suppose there to be no harm in

calling the essential feature of action 'trying', especially if willing can count as trying. Perhaps then, 'trying' will do as well, if not better than 'volition'. Hornsby remarks that

> "Tryings are at an advantage here. "Try' is a common enough word. And at least there is no problem about showing that people sometimes try to act, even if it takes a philosopher to find a serious interest in showing that when we act we always try to act." (p.47)

Yet, even if we show that we always try whenever we act, this does not vindicate the view that tryings are a type of event essential to action. Indeed, there is good reason for supposing that trying cannot fill this role.

If trying were a special mental act (a conation), in keeping with other such occurrences, it would have content. Thus, the content, for example, of my trying to open the fridge door would be the action of opening that door, for this is what I try to do. The content of any trying would be the action that it is a trying to do; one always tries to perform some action.

This generates a problem when conjoined with the fact that trying to do any action is necessarily involved in doing that action. In order to do any action A, it is necessary to try to A, and this trying is not merely a prerequisite for A-ing, it is part of doing the action in question.

The result of combining these facts is that in order to

successfully do A, I must do all that is involved in doing A. Hence, I must try to A, since this is part of doing A. But since trying to A has as its content, the action A (and all that A-ing involves), it follows that trying to do A is trying to do all that is involved in doing A. Since part of A-ing is trying to A, this means that trying to A is part of the content of trying to A, so that trying to A requires that one try to try to A (cf. McCann, 1975:435-6). Thus, the supposition that trying is a special type of act fundamental to action, leads to a vicious regress of tryings.

Significantly, this problem is avoided if we deny that trying has content, but this is to deny it conation-status. Instead of regarding trying as conation, and in keeping with the position I have been defending, we can see trying not as a particular sort of event, but as a way of describing anything that is part of the business of performing an action. In this light, trying would have no content, and there is no risk of having to try to try to try, etc.

In addition, this type of regress cannot be generated for volitions as conations, for although they would have content, the content of a volition would not be an action, but some bodily movement (an action-result). Thus, the content of my volition when I will my arm to rise is not my action of raising the arm, but the related event of my arm rising. This means that although volitions have content, and are part of what is involved in doing any action, since the content is not the action (which includes the volition), no regress can be generated.

(8) HORNSBY AGAINST THE REGRESS OF TRYINGS

The regress argument given above should be adequate to ensure that trying is not misconstrued as a special type of event, but Jennifer Hornsby believes her position is immune. So, I want to consider briefly her defence of trying as conation, against this threatened regress.

Hornsby's version of the regress argument runs as follows:

> "Since an action of Ø-ing is an event of trying to Ø, someone's trying to Ø must be his trying to try to Ø. But again, his trying to try to Ø, if the content of a trying is an action, must be his trying to try to try to Ø..." (p.63)

Her first response to this argument is to say:

> "It appears that the truth of 'Anything that is a Ø-ing is a trying to Ø' is used in this argument to guarantee the replacement of 'Ø' with 'try to Ø' in the context 'try to _'. But compare the claim that, in the presence of 'Anything which is an F is a G', 'F' can be replaced with 'G' in the context 'not _'. The result is that we may conclude from 'Not Fx' that 'Not Gx', i.e. that we have licensed the fallacy of Denying the Antecedent. The onus is on the user of... [the regress] argument to justify his step." (p.63)

This response is plausible only if we accept the initial premise Hornsby has imposed on the regress argument, viz. an action of Ø-ing is an event of trying to Ø. But it is certainly false that every action is identical to a trying to do that action. More reasonably, the trying is anything that goes into doing the action, short of action

itself. When a trying is successful it does not become the action one is trying to do, it results in this action. So we can forestall Hornsby's misgivings by replacing this premise in the regress with the more acceptable alternative: every action of Ø-ing involves trying to Ø (or: every action of Ø-ing is in part composed of trying to Ø). This change to the argument renders the sort of substitution criticised by Hornsby, less alluring.

Although we may alter the regress argument to avoid such a criticism, it is far from evident that my original account of the argument relies on the sort of direct substitution that Hornsby questions. Certainly, there is no substitution simply on the basis that Ø-ing is trying to Ø. Instead, the principle that trying to Ø is involved in Ø-ing is conjoined with another, that to try to Ø is to try to do whatever is involved in Ø-ing (on the assumption that tryings have actions as content). It is the combination of these two principles that licenses any substitution that takes place. Consequently, the onus is on Hornsby to show any implicit fallacy in this form of the regress.

Hornsby's main defence against this regress argument is featured in an extensive footnote, and on this occasion she considers yet another version of the argument, viz:

> "If a tries to Ø, then try-to-Ø is something a does. But if anything is something someone does, then he tries to do that thing. So a tries to try to Ø." (p.64)

In her defence, she notes firstly, that she does not adhere

to the second premise of this argument, unless 'something someone intentionally does' is meant in the antecedent (loc. cit.). This is not an inspiring defence, since I would not accept premise 2 in this form of the regress. It has been argued that if someone acts then he tries to do that action, but not all doings are actions, hence not all doings require tryings. So this premise, if not false, is at least in doubt.

What about the revised premise suggested by Hornsby? i.e. 'if anything is something someone intentionally does, then he tries to do that thing.' This seems to be acceptable, but does it suffice to generate the regress? Obviously it does not, because the first premise is now inappropriate. It is now no help that 'If a tries to Ø, then try-to-Ø is something a does', for the fact that someone does something in trying to Ø, does not establish that he has acted. So we would require a change in this first premise to correspond to the change in premise 2. Premise 1 would have to read: 'if a tries to Ø, then try-to-Ø is something a intentionally does.' The trouble is that this premise is now false. From our earlier discussion we know that from the fact of someone trying to do something it does not follow that they have intentionally done anything, for trying need not be action.

The remaining details of Hornsby's defence pertain to this rather anaemic version of the regress argument. I feel it is sufficient to note that the regress formulations she considers are not the healthiest specimens available. So far

as I can see, Hornsby has little to offer that goes toward meeting the rigours of the full-blooded version detailed earlier. I conclude therefore that this argument is adequate to defeat the view of trying as a specific type of event; a conation.

To sum up: we have learned that despite Vesey's qualms to the contrary, the patient whose arm is paralysed or anaesthetised, is reasonably seen as <u>trying</u> to raise his arm, and that this may consist in his willing the arm to rise. Furthermore, given that trying is omnipresent in action, it is true to say that the patient does 'what he usually does', in trying to raise his arm, for he ordinarily wills, as a minimal trying, to do whatever he wishes to do.

Against McCann, I have denied that trying must always be action, on the grounds that volition can be a trying. (We have already appreciated that volition is not action.) In addition, trying is best understood as whatever forms part of the process of doing any action, and not as a special category of events; not as conation. Finally, Hornsby's attempts to defend this latter view by fending off the regress of tryings, do not adequately meet the problem.

Having gained a clearer perspective on trying and its relation to action and volition, it is time to assess the performance of the concept of volition against its critics.

CHAPTER 8 : RYLE ON VOLITION

(1) RYLE'S DILEMMA

A most severe attack on the volition theory comes in Ryle's critique entitled 'The myth of volitions' (Ryle, 1949:62). Here, he offers an apparently damning criticism of the role that volition is supposed to play in the volitionist's theory. According to proponents of this theory, volitions make sense of the distinction between voluntary and involuntary movements; which is in fact presented as equivalent to the distinction between actions and mere events. Voluntary movements are those which are caused by volitions to bring about those movements, while involuntary movements are the remaining movements, not caused by volitions.

Against this view that the voluntariness of events can be understood in terms of their being caused by volitions, Ryle offers a dilemma. He asks:

> "what of volitions themselves? Are they voluntary or involuntary acts of mind?" (p.67)

He suggests that 'either answer leads to absurdities'. If we suppose that volitions are voluntary, then, on this account of voluntariness, they must been produced by a further volition, and so on ad infinitum.

The alternative is to suppose that volitions are involuntary. But here we are left with the peculiar idea

that the voluntariness of actions may rest with involuntary acts of will. It seems absurd to hold that at the heart of every voluntary action is an involuntary mental act. Thus, Ryle's dilemma seems to reduce to absurdity, the suggestion that causation by volitions is the key to understanding voluntariness.

A tempting way to respond to Ryle's argument is to deny that volitions are either voluntary or involuntary; that to suppose they are either is to commit a category mistake, since volitions make things voluntary, and are not themselves proper candidates for such a description.

To accept the validity of Ryle's question 'are volitions voluntary or involuntary?', is to commit oneself to answering either one or the other, and since either alternative leads to unacceptable results on Ryle's dilemma, it appeals to the volitionist to deny that either of these answers apply. But this only works if it can be shown that there is something illegitimate in raising this question with regard to volitions in particular. This, in turn, seems implausible on the assumption that volitions are a species of act, for acts are the proper domain of voluntariness and involuntariness.

Perhaps then it helps to deny that volitions are acts. But on the use of 'voluntary' in question, to describe an event thus is simply to characterise it as an action. Hence, to deny that any doing, even a volition, is actional is to deny that it is voluntary, which is to say that it is involuntary. To admit this is to be impaled on the second

horn of Ryle's dilemma. So, the simple manoeuvre of denying that volitions are themselves acts will not suffice to avoid the dilemma.

It appears that the way out of Ryle's dilemma does not lie in denying sense to his question when applied to volitions. For volitionists, the problem becomes that of finding some way of allowing Ryle's question while avoiding his dilemma.

At least one philosopher believes this can be done. According to Hugh McCann, it is possible to regard volitions as voluntary without falling into Ryle's regress. In McCann's words:

> "To suppose that if volition provides the element of control in actions like raising one's arm, volition can itself exhibit control only through something like a further volition, is rather like supposing that if we explain the wetness of a wet street by saying that there is water on it, we must explain the wetness of water by postulating further water. Volition can be voluntary, in the way that water is wet- that is essentially, in a way that does not require some means as explanation." (McCann, 1974:472)

McCann's suggestion is this: water causes things to be wet and is wet itself, but is not caused to be so by water. In similar fashion, volitions may cause movements to be voluntary and be voluntary themselves while not being caused to be so by further volitions. This graphic analogy suggests the viability of calling volitions voluntary without succumbing to the regress horn of Ryle's dilemma. For, if volitions are voluntary in this 'essential' manner, it would

be absurd to suppose that their voluntariness lay in causation by other volitions, just as it would be absurd to suppose that the wetness of water depended upon other water. Yet, although McCann's analogy is initially plausible, it is not easy to assess.

The first point to note appears trivial. While streets are described as wet if they are covered with water, this is not what we convey when we say that water is wet. The sense in which 'wet' applies to streets is different from the sense in which it applies to water. To call water 'wet' is to say something different of it, than we say of streets, umbrellas, or litmus paper, by calling these wet. Further, just as in this analogy, the sense of 'wet' differs between its two applications, so too would the sense of 'voluntary'.

Hence, to suppose that the wetness of water (the voluntariness of volition) lies in being smeared with water (being caused by a volition), would be a failure to appreciate the equivocation between the two uses of the key term. If we supposed no ambiguity in the use of these terms, then to call water 'wet', and volitions 'voluntary' could equally result in a regress. For then we would have to suppose the former due to further water and the latter to causation by other volitions. And these would in turn be wet, and voluntary, respectively.

So it appears that McCann's way out of the regress is to use a different sense of 'voluntary' in describing volitions. Thus, he describes volitions as voluntary 'in the way that water is wet- that is essentially...', which

differs from that applied to movements, as the sense of 'wet' differs when applied to water from that in which streets, trees, or blotting paper, may be wet. It should be little wonder then if Ryle's regress does not get started when confronted with McCann's strategy, for in calling volitions 'voluntary' in McCann's sense, we are not supposing them caused by further volitions.

This account of McCann's analogy gives rise to an obvious objection. If McCann avoids the regress by employing a changed sense of 'voluntary' as applied to volitions, then it is open to Ryle to set aside this new sense, and ask again whether volitions are voluntary or involuntary in the more familiar sense in which movements are so described. For it would remain to be answered whether, in this sense, volitions are, or are not, voluntary. It appears that McCann neither answers nor validly avoids this question. Consequently, he does not avoid the difficulties which follow from either answer.

If, however, the sense in which McCann calls volitions voluntary, logically barred the question of whether volitions are voluntary in the ordinary sense, then this objection to McCann's strategy would be overcome. In fact, this is precisely what McCann has in mind in his parallel between the wetness of water and the voluntariness of volitions. Just as the ordinary sense in which streets, towels and newspapers get wet is logically based upon the different sense in which water is wet, so, McCann urges that the ordinary sense in which movements are voluntary is

logically based upon the different sense in which volitions are voluntary. If this were so, then surely one could not ask of volitions whether they were voluntary in the non-basic sense of voluntary, any more than one could ask of water if it was wet in the way that streets are wet. This is precisely the point of McCann's analogy.

There are two parts to the analogy. Firstly, the non-basic sense in which streets are wet (so called, by extension of meaning from the wetness of water), is likened to the non-basic sense in which movements are voluntary (presumably, so called, by extension of meaning from the voluntariness of volitions). Secondly, the basic sense in which volitions are called voluntary is likened to the basic sense in which water is wet.

Clearly, McCann wants to view 'volitions are voluntary' as on a par with 'water is wet'. We can suppose the latter analytically true, which makes the question 'is water wet?', redundant. Hence, we may regard the former as analytically true, and deem the question 'are volitions voluntary?' redundant too. It is by virtue of the analyticity of 'water is wet' that no further explanation, after the fashion of the explanation for the wetness of streets, is appropriate. So, if 'volitions are voluntary' is also analytic, no further explanation of their voluntariness, after the fashion of the explanation of the voluntariness of movements, would be appropriate for volitions.

If it makes sense to call volitions voluntary without thereby being compelled to suppose them caused by further

voluntary volitions, Ryle's regress may be avoided. We can see that McCann attempts this, by supposing that volitions are 'essentially' voluntary as water is essentially wet. Thereby, while the voluntary nature of movements may be explained in terms of volitions (as the wetness of streets is explained in terms of water), the voluntary nature of volitions may not be so explained (as the wetness of water is not explained in terms of further water). As the structure of the analogy stands it appears to afford McCann a means of preventing the Rylean regress. But his analogy is not altogether apposite.

While it is plausible that streets are called wet by extension of meaning from the sense in which water is wet, the analogous point for voluntariness is less easy to accept. Do we ordinarily call movements voluntary by extension from the sense in which volitions are voluntary? Presumably not, otherwise we should all be expected to appreciate that volitions are indeed voluntary, and this point would not be at issue.

Further, while the wetness of streets can be understood in terms of the wetness of water, we do not ordinarily think of the voluntariness of movements as deriving from <u>the voluntariness</u> of volitions. In fact, the volition theory qualifies a movement as voluntary if caused by a volition, it says nothing of the necessity of voluntariness on the part of this volition. Yet, if McCann's analogy is correct, it would not simply be causation by a volition that rendered a movement voluntary. Rather, the movement's voluntariness

would derive from the voluntariness of the volition. Furthermore, the voluntariness of the movement would simply be an extension, so to speak, of the voluntariness of the volition; as the wetness of a street is an extension of the wetness of water.

This presents a problem. On the volition theory, the voluntariness of movements is understood to consist in their being caused by a volition, yet the analogy requires that the voluntary nature of movements derives, by extension, from the more basic voluntariness of volitions. This seems to lead to the conclusion that voluntariness understood as 'caused by a volition', may still apply to volitions. After all, the sense in which streets are wet is really the sense in which water is wet, extended to cover the instances where the water is present on the street. So, the sense in which movements are voluntary should be the sense in which volitions are voluntary, extended to cover the instances where volitions occur in conjunction with movements. Since the voluntariness of movements consists in causation by volitions, it follows that the voluntariness of volitions should also require causation by further volitions. Hence, Ryle's regress would be regenerated within McCann's analogy.

By careful dissection of this analogy, we can see that the alleged parallel is not entirely convincing. The wetness of streets derives from the presence of water, which is inherently wet. Hence the term 'wet' is extended from the water to the street. To call the street wet is really to say that there is something inherently wet (water) upon it. This

wetness is a quality of water, which is present on the street, by virtue of the presence of water.

To maintain the analogy, the voluntariness of volitions should be an inherent quality of volitions, and the sense in which movements are so described should be an extended usage, signifying that the inherent quality of voluntariness is present with the movement, because a volition is present. The obvious difficulty is that 'voluntary', understood as 'caused by a volition', cannot be an inherent quality of volitions. It is peculiar to construe causal generation as a quality, let alone an inherent quality, of a particular event.

We must also note that while 'the street is wet' and 'the movement is voluntary', look to have the same subject predicate form, their deep structures are different. To call a street wet is to attribute a certain quality to the street, whereas, to describe a movement as voluntary is to ascribe not a quality, but a particular causal genesis to the movement. This is the basis upon which William Lyons summarily dismisses McCann's analogy. He observes that

> "Streets become wet by being smeared with water, but bodily movements do not become voluntary by being smeared with voluntariness. According to the theory of volitions, bodily movements become voluntary by being caused by items called 'volitions'. Streets do not become wet by being brought into existence by water or caused by water. So while it is redundant to ask whether water is watery or smeared with water, it is not redundant to ask whether a volition (a particular form of exercising power) is caused by another volition (a similar exercise of power) or not." (Lyons, 1980:78)

Thus, Lyons claims that because of the disanalogy between volitions making movements voluntary and water making things wet, McCann fails to avoid Ryle's dilemma.

A similar response is made by Michael Gorr, who says of McCann's analogy:

> "Unfortunately this won't do at all. To predicate wetness of something is to assert that it is in some way covered or suffused with liquid. Thus, I suppose, it would be possible (although generally trivial and pointless) to predicate wetness of a liquid itself. The concept of 'voluntariness' or 'being under one's control', however, is, according to the classical view ...properly explicated in terms of volitional causation. But to then characterise a volition as itself being voluntary or under the agent's control would lead to an infinite regress... Thus the fact that a liquid, which functions to make other things wet, may itself be properly characterised as wet in no way supports the quite different contention that a volition, which serves to make other things voluntary, may itself be properly characterised as voluntary. The analogy, I am afraid, simply doesn't hold water." (Gorr, 1979a:243)

Gorr is correct on one point. If voluntariness is strictly explained in terms of volitional causation then to deem volitions voluntary creates a regress. But why is there no similar regress when we describe water as wet? After all, if wetness is to be explained strictly in terms of something's being covered with liquid, then to deem water wet should create a regress of liquids covered with liquid. Clearly, there is no regress in the case of water's being wet, and this we can attribute to the fact that in saying 'water is wet' we say something different in terms of 'wetness', than we say when we say 'the street is wet'. Similarly, this lesson may apply to volitions being voluntary. But even so,

there remains the problem of the disanalogy in McCann's example.

It seems to me that there is a rejoinder to a criticism such as that of Lyons (above). McCann may accept that there is a discrepancy in his analogy; that volitions are differently related to the voluntariness of movements than water is to the wetness of streets; yet maintain that the central point of his analogy still obtains. Thus, he may claim that parallel to the wetness of water, volitions can be regarded as voluntary in some essential or inherent manner, such that the question 'are volitions voluntary or involuntary?' becomes redundant. If this much remains plausible despite the alleged flaw in the analogy, surely Ryle's dilemma is defeated?

If McCann's analogy lent credence to the notion of essential voluntariness of volitions this would be a step towards defeating Ryle's dilemma. But given the discrepancy in the analogy between the wetness of water and the voluntariness of volition, it hardly gives support to this notion. It is only open to McCann to suggest that volitions may be essentially voluntary, as water is essentially wet, yet <u>not precisely as water is essentially wet</u>, for the relation of wet water to wet streets is different from that of voluntary volitions to voluntary movements. Because of this difference, the analogy does not give us reason to believe that volitions may be inherently voluntary in any way that might avoid Ryle's regress.

Certainly, it is left open whether volitions might be

essentially voluntary but this bare possibility does not show that Ryle's dilemma can be avoided, unless it can be further shown that the relation of this voluntariness of volitions to the voluntariness of movements is such as to render it redundant to ask of volitions whether they are voluntary in the way that movements may be so. Again it seems that McCann's analogy cannot offer a solution to the problem posed by Ryle's dilemma.

Yet it may be objected that the detail of McCann's analogy has been misconstrued. We have taken the analogy as a defence against the regress horn of Ryle's dilemma, which it clearly purports to be. But the sense of 'voluntary' employed by McCann is not that of 'caused by a volition', rather it is 'the element of control in actions'. This is clear if we look again at his presentation of the parallel between the wetness of water and the voluntariness of volition, where he says

> "To suppose that if volition provides the element of control in actions like raising one's arm, volition can itself exhibit control only through something like a further volition, is rather like supposing that if we explain the wetness of a wet street by saying that there is water on it, we must explain the wetness of water by postulating further water. Volitions can be voluntary in the way that water is wet- that is essentially, in a way that does not require some means as explanation." (op. cit., p472)

Obviously, in calling volitions voluntary McCann means that they exhibit a certain element of control. And since this is readily understood as a quality of volitions, which they extend over the movements they produce, the parallel

with the wetness of water seems more precise than hitherto supposed.

At first sight this seems to make no difference to the validity of McCann's argument. After all, if the element of control exhibited in voluntary movement is due to the movement's being caused by a volition, surely we can reasonably ask whether the element of control present in volitions themselves, is the result of their being caused by further volitions. Whatever the answer, the propriety of this question proves Ryle's dilemma effective after all.

But is this a proper question to ask? Clearly, McCann wants to say not. His reason being that to ask this question of volitions is equivalent to asking the redundant question of water, what makes it wet. On the other hand, Lyons urges that this is not a good analogy and hence it fails to support McCann's claim. In contrast to Lyons, I wish to argue that McCann's analogy is indeed effective, which can be appreciated when we see that the voluntariness of volitions is rightly analogous to the wetness of water. To appreciate this, we have to reiterate the analogy, and consider Lyon's objection in detail.

(2) MAKING McCANN'S ANALOGY WORK

According to McCann, while it is proper to ask of streets what makes them wet, this is a redundant question when applied to water. For water is not wet by virtue of something that makes it wet. Rather, its wetness is an inherent quality, logically tied to its being water. So,

while we can ask what makes streets wet, and receive the answer'water', we cannot ask this of water, for the fact that water is water renders the question either illegitimate, or at least foolish.

Turning to voluntariness, it is suggested that the element of control (which is the voluntariness of volition) is an inherent quality of volitions. For a volition is not voluntary by virtue of something which makes it voluntary. Rather, its voluntariness is logically tied to its being a volition. So, while it is sensible to ask what makes movements voluntary, and receive the answer 'volitions', we cannot ask this of volitions, for the fact that a volition is a volition renders the question illegitimate, or at least redundant.

In reply, one might exclaim that it does make sense to ask what makes volitions voluntary, if they are alleged to be so. Surely, if something has a particular quality one can ask how it comes to have it?

But then one may say the same about the wetness of water. Even if water is essentially wet, one can ask for an explanation of this wetness; what makes water so. However, to ask this, is to ask about the nature of water, and this can only be met with a constitutive answer, in terms, perhaps, of chemical structures and their physical correlates. Similarly, to ask of volitions what makes them voluntary, would be to ask after their nature. It is to ask what the voluntariness of volitions consists in. And the answer to this is already given. The voluntariness of

volitions consists in the element of control that they exhibit. We must note however, that while it is proper to enquire after the nature of both water's wetness and volition's voluntariness, it remains improper to ask what makes water wet or volition voluntary, so long as these are questions of aetiology rather than 'essence', for water's being wet and volition's being voluntary are qualities logically tied to the natures of water and volition respectively.

What then of Lyon's assault on the McCann analogy? Lyons emphasises that while movements become voluntary through being caused by volitions, streets do not become wet by being brought into existence by water. So, he concludes that while it may be redundant to ask whether water is wet, or smeared with water, it is not redundant to ask of volitions whether they are caused by further volitions. The disanalogy is the difference in relationship between volitions and voluntary movements on the one hand, and water and wet streets on the other. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see this disanalogy as relevant to the issue of redundancy, for the redundancy of the above questions does not depend upon the character of the relation between water and wet streets, nor upon that between volitions and voluntary movements.

What makes it redundant to ask whether water is wet or smeared with water, is not the fact that streets (nor any things that may come to be wet) become so by being smeared with water. Rather, the question is redundant because

wetness is an inherent or essential quality of water.

Consequently, if the precise relation between water and wet streets has no bearing upon the redundancy of asking whether water is wet, then the fact that this relation is not precisely analogous to that between volitions and voluntary movements should indicate nothing about the redundancy of asking whether volitions are voluntary. As in the water example, we may say that what makes it redundant to ask of volitions whether they are voluntary, is not the character of relation that they bear to voluntary movements, but the fact that voluntariness is an essential or inherent quality of volition.

So, it seems that while Lyons correctly locates a disanalogy between the relations of water to wet streets and volitions to voluntary movements, he is surely wrong in supposing that this bears upon the analogy between the redundancy of asking whether water is wet, and the redundancy of asking whether volitions are voluntary. We might conclude from this that McCann's analogy is sound, despite Lyons' critique. Yet there is a possible response from the Lyons' camp.

Even though the redundancy of asking whether water is wet may not require that water make things wet in precisely the way that it does, it may still be crucial that the relation of water to wet streets is <u>not</u> one of causal generation. That is, Lyons may say the relevance of this disanalogy is that if the relation is one of causal generation it must affect the redundancy of asking whether

volitions are voluntary. Such that, since a causal relation holds , it is not redundant to ask this of volitions.

Lyons' objection indicates that the way water makes things wet is different from the way in which volitions make movements voluntary. Thus, while things become wet by having water upon them, or being smeared with water, movements become voluntary by <u>being caused to exist</u> by volitions. Clearly, the basis upon which we describe things as wet differs from that upon which movements would be described as voluntary. The question is whether this difference is such as to remove all plausibility from McCann's analogy. Does it show that the logic of 'volition' and 'voluntary movements' is importantly different from the logic of 'water' and 'wet streets'?

If McCann's analogy is to be plausible and parallel the water case, we must be able to suppose that the voluntariness of volitions is an inherent quality which explains the voluntariness of movements. Surely this much is plausible. What Lyons' objection notes is that the form of explanation given in this case will differ from the explanation of how water makes streets wet. Whereas volitions explain the voluntariness of movements in terms of causing those movements to exist, water explains the wetness of streets in terms of its presence upon those streets. But this difference can make no difference to McCann's case unless the relation of causal genesis supposed between volitions and voluntary movements would fail to render the question 'what makes volitions voluntary?' redundant, even

though we suppose that voluntariness is an inherent quality of volition. And this is precisely the point of Lyons' revamped case as outlined above.

So, Lyons may claim that the causal relation has the effect of failing to secure redundancy, but what reason is there to believe this? There is no argument to lend support to this view. In addition, we have seen that the redundancy of asking whether water is wet depends upon the inherent wetness of water, not upon the nature of water's relation to whatever it makes wet. We have no grounds on which to suppose that if a relation of causal generation held between water and wet streets, it would affect this redundancy. So, we have no grounds for believing that the causal link between volitions and voluntary movements affects the redundancy in this case either. For want of such a ground, we can only conclude that McCann's analogy stands.

This being the case we are in a position to suppose that volitions can be construed as voluntary, without fear of invoking the regress horn of Ryle's dilemma, for on this account it becomes redundant to ask of volitions, what makes them voluntary.

(3) VOLITIONS AS INVOLUNTARY

The conclusion that volitions may coherently be construed as voluntary may be no more than one would expect, given that willing is something that we do. Yet the opponent of volition may not be content to discard Ryle's dilemma from his arsenal. Indeed, he may grant that McCann's analogy

adequately defends volitions as, in a sense, voluntary, yet insist that this is still a different sense from that applicable to actions proper. Thus, even if there is a possible reading of 'volitions are voluntary' that is coherent, yet redundant, this does not show that volitions are either voluntary or involuntary in the sense usually relevant to actions. Clearly, this manoeuvre threatens to reinvoke Ryle's dilemma in spite of McCann's analogy. Could we suppose that volitions are in some sense involuntary? After all, on the present account, although volitions may arise from our thoughts, beliefs, intentions and the like, willing is not something that one can be said to control. Does this make volitions involuntary?

On this question I am at odds with McCann, who insists that

> "The modality of volition has... to be fundamentally executive, an exercise of the agent's general power consciously to cause, and aimed at causing what is willed." (McCann, 1975:439)

While I accept the 'executive modality' of volition, and that willing is an exercise of the agent to cause what he wishes, I have consistently denied that volition is the sphere of agent's control. And since volition is not a conscious element in action, it is not consciously 'aimed' at what one wishes to achieve (see Chapter 6). Rather, the exercise of 'active power', consists in the bringing about of some desired end, by the causal means of volition. One does not consciously 'bring about' volition itself, so

despite any possibility of regarding it as essentially voluntary, it may be credible to view its occurrence as involuntary.

Before considering the threat posed to this contention by Ryle's dilemma, a word about the apparent contradiction in deeming volition both 'essentially voluntary' and 'involuntary'. Happily, this contradiction is merely apparent, for in describing volitions as voluntary this expresses the conviction that some unique quality of volition goes to explain the voluntariness of voluntary movements. Of course this means that the description of volition itself as involuntary may be entirely apposite since it is patently not voluntary in the ordinary sense in which actions are so. Consequently, there is no incoherence in the view that volition is 'essentially voluntary' yet involuntary.

The worry with this admission is that the second horn of Ryle's dilemma is invoked against the view that volitions are involuntary. Nevertheless, I would suggest that it is proper to say that volitions are not voluntary, and to support this I offer an analogy.

When switched on, an electric circuit is 'live', if there is a flow of electrons through the circuit. The quality of the circuit's being live is to be explained causally, in terms of electrons, just as a movements' being voluntary is to be explained causally in terms of volition.

If we are to understand the voluntariness of movements

as lying in their being caused by volitions, then it is inappropriate to regard volitions as themselves, voluntary, just as it is inappropriate to construe electrons as being 'live'. 'Voluntariness' is properly a feature of movements, as 'being live' is properly a feature of circuits. We should not be tempted (under the influence of Ryle) to ask of electrons whether or not they are live, for they can not be so. And the alternative, that they are 'dead', does not leave a mystery as to how the 'life' in the circuit derives from something which is dead.

Similarly, when we deny that volitions are voluntary this need leave no mystery as to how something voluntary can derive from something involuntary. For here, as in the previous example, we have a change of explanatory level such that, certain categories of description appropriate to the one level are inappropriate to the other.

Hence, our analogy suggests that on this pattern of explanation for voluntary motion, it is inappropriate to ask whether volitions are voluntary or involuntary. And this should have no untoward consequences.

But Ryle has a rejoinder to this. For if we deny that volitions are voluntary we must regard them as involuntary. In which case the second horn of his dilemma comes into play. Here, Ryle argues for the absurdity of supposing that underlying every voluntary movement is an involuntary volition. Already, our analogy suggests that this may be no more paradoxical than to suppose that something 'dead' (electrons), underlies and explains the nature of

something's being 'live' (an electric circuit). But Ryle puts his point simply and persuasively:

> "If I cannot help willing to pull the trigger, it would be absurd to describe my pulling it as 'voluntary'." (op. cit., p.67)

Clearly, Ryle identifies something's being voluntary with its being in the agent's power to affect whether it will happen or not. Hence, if I 'cannot help' the occurrence of an event which causes my pulling the trigger, then I 'cannot help' pulling the trigger.

In response, the volitionist may insist that being able to help doing something is being able to bring about that thing by willing it. I can bring it about that the trigger is pulled by willing it to be so. Hence, I can help pulling the trigger, and my pulling it is voluntary. The fact that I cannot help willing to pull the trigger is neither here nor there. This simply means that I cannot bring it about that I will to pull the trigger by willing that I will to pull it. Or, to put this in Rylean language, I cannot will the willing.

Against this, it may be objected that my being able to help doing something requires that what occurs depend upon me; that it would not occur otherwise. It is this belief that gives Ryle's comment its rhetorical force, and certainly this does not seem to be true if I cannot help willing. For then, whatever happens as a result of my willing seems just as inevitable as the willing itself.

Hence, it should be every bit as involuntary.

The trouble with this rejoinder is that it is not a necessary condition of something's being voluntary that it would not have occurred, had it not been willed. Otherwise we should have to say that overdetermined actions, and those which would have been otherwise determined, are involuntary.

My intentional breaking of the vase is not rendered involuntary on the correct assumption that the gust of wind coming from the open window, shortly after I broke the vase, would have broken it in any case. Also, in cases where it is unclear whether the resulting event is caused by one's will or some other concurrent efficient cause, we would not deem the result involuntary. It is sufficient that the result could have been caused by the volition to bring it about.

This is enough to show that Ryle's accusation of absurdity is ill-founded, for it clearly makes sense to suggest that I cannot help willing to pull the trigger and yet my pulling it be voluntary. For it is not a necessary condition of voluntariness that the event in question would not have occurred had it not been willed. In turn, this shows that there is no paradox in supposing that all things voluntary result from involuntary volitions. Consequently, Ryle's dilemma fails, for volitions may be construed as involuntary, without this 'leading to absurdities', as Ryle would have us believe.

Although volition can be seen to weather such Rylean storms its coherence is not thereby assured. The following

chapter indicates further obstacles that it must face.

CHAPTER 9 : THE LOGICAL CONNECTION ARGUMENT

(1) THE PROBLEM OF DESCRIPTIVE DEFICIENCY

To insist that volitions are familiar occurrences of which we all are or can be conscious, seems very rash. (This is evidenced from our discussions in Chapter Three.) Indeed, Ryle argues that the concept of volition is problematic for the fact that we are not aware of such events, and do not have words to describe their occurrence. Thus, he writes:

> "no one, save to endorse the theory, ever describes his own conduct, or that of his acquaintances, in the recommended idioms. No one ever says such things as that at 10a.m. he was occupied in willing this or that, or that he performed five quick and easy volitions and two slow and difficult volitions between midday and lunchtime." (Ryle, 1949:63)

and again,

> "By what sorts of predicates should they [volitions] be described? Can they be sudden or gradual, strong or weak, difficult or easy, enjoyable or disagreeable? Can they be accelerated or decelerated, interrupted or suspended? Can people be efficient or inefficient at them? Can we take lessons in executing them? Are they fatiguing or distracting? Can I do two or seven of them synchronously?..." (loc. cit.)

What Ryle's points indicate is the fact that talk of volitions is not a familiar idiom. They go no further than this in casting doubt on the volition account of action. After all, if ordinarily we never talk of volitions, it is reasonable to expect that we will not know how they should

be described.

Melden takes the Rylean criticism a step further, by arguing that if we do not have the facility to describe volitional occurrences, the notion of volition must be either incoherent, or simply mistaken. Melden also notes the impropriety of insisting, in the absence of such descriptions, that we are all familiar with volitions. As he puts it:

> "Unless I can recognise this act [of volition] by having some description in mind that applies to such acts and only to these, it is at best a simple begging of the question to, insist that all of us really understand what is being referred to; in fact it is an implied charge of dishonesty directed at those who refuse to give their assent." (Melden, 1961:47)

Clearly, it is absurd to insist that we are all acquainted with volitions if there is neither the vocabulary nor the linguistic usage to support this claim. But this alone does not show that volitions do not occur, nor that they are not crucial to our understanding of the nature of action.

My own suggestion is not that we are all familiar with the occurrence of volition, but that volitions are causally operative in the performance of actions. Specifically, I claim that volitions cause the bodily movements with which we are all familiar, which movements constitute action-results. Unlike other volition theorists, notably Prichard and McCann, I do not maintain that volition is itself an action. Nevertheless, problems of description still arise for this volition theory.

Melden forwards several related objections against the concept of volition, some of which construe volitions as themselves being actions. Although in this respect, my own position differs from that which Melden is attacking, this difference is not crucial to his arguments, which can thereby be applied to the present volition theory.

The main difficulty that emerges for the volition account is that of describing the alleged volition, for there appears to be no ready way of referring to it save by mentioning the bodily movement(s) it is supposed to cause. Thus, if we suppose that when I raise my arm, a volition occurs which by causing my muscles to move makes my arm rise, there appears to be no available description of the volition in this sequence, other than, the volition to raise my arm, or the willing to move my muscles. Both of these descriptions mention supposed effects of the volition itself. There are several reasons why this apparent descriptive deficiency is problematic.

The first difficulty is that talk of volitions can only be comprehensible if we are able to describe them independently of their supposed effects. Otherwise, if the willing A is describable only as the action (or movement) B, then the claim that movement B is caused by volition A degenerates into the uninformative 'the cause of B causes B'. This leaves us wondering why anyone should proffer a theory which says so little; which in fact says nothing at all. As Melden puts it:

> "If all that can be said of the alleged act of volition, by virtue of which a muscle movement is produced, is that it is the sort of thing that produces a muscle movement, there is every uncertainty that anyone has understood what is meant by 'the act of volition'. (op. cit., p.47)

In the absence of any informative description, it seems pointless to talk of volitions, for this can offer nothing more than the implication that bodily movements have causes, which assumption is surely common-place and innocuous.

It does seem that all convenient reference to the alleged occurrence of volitions cites the bodily movements that they are supposed to cause, but if we accept this, must we accept the worthlessness of the concept of volition?

Even if it were true that the facility we have for describing volitions is limited to citing their effects this does not mean that the volition theory is empty of content. The theory says that volitions are occurrences that cause bodily movements, hence, that volitions are causally effective in the performance of action. In saying this, or in declaring that my arm raising was brought about by my volition to raise my arm, we may not be informed to the extent of knowing precisely what volitions are, or to the point of recognising or identifying the volition that produced my arm movement.

The significant content of the theory is not simply the implication that bodily movements or actions are caused, it is the contention that the causes of such bodily movements, termed 'volitions', are what characterise actions as such. It is the hypothesis that the presence of a particular sort

of occurrence, namely volition, distinguishes actions from non-actions. This account is not born of the belief that we are initially acquainted with volitions, for we have not noticed that volitions accompany all, and only actions, and thereby formed a volitional account of the nature of action. The strategy is the reverse. From the belief that actions and non-actions are different, we develop a theory to account for this difference, a theory which points to the existence, or the hypothetically required existence, of volitions.

So long as the volition theory is viewed in this light the accusation, based upon descriptive deficiency, that the theory is vacuous may be discharged. For although it may not actually locate volitions or present them for scrutiny, that it gives reason for belief in the existence of volition is a measure of its success as a theory of action.

While it is possible to dismiss this attack on volition, descriptive deficiency gives rise to further difficulties for this theory. If our facility for describing volitions is limited to citing their alleged effects, a problem arises as to the relation between volition and bodily movement.

According to the volition account, volitions are causally related to the movements involved in actions, yet how can these items be related as cause and effect if they are logically related to each other? The supposed necessity of describing volitions in terms of bodily movements implies the logical tie between the two. The problem that emerges is

the apparent inconsistency of the volition and movement being logically related, which relation is non-contingent, and also causally related, which relation is contingent. Hence it appears that volition and movement are both contingently and non-contingently related, which is contradictory.

This point is put strongly by Melden:

> "This then is the logical incoherence involved in the doctrine of acts of volition: Acts of volition are alleged to be direct causes of certain bodily phenomena... just as the latter are causes of the raising of one's arm. For, it is alleged, just as we raise our arms by moving our muscles, so we move our muscles by willing them to move. But no account of the alleged volitions is intelligible that does not involve a reference to the relevant bodily phenomenon. And no interior cause, mental or physiological can have this logical feature of acts of volition. Let the interior event which we call 'the act of volition', be mental or physical, it must be logically distinct from the alleged effect. Yet nothing can be an act of volition that is not logically connected with that which is willed- the act of willing is intelligible only as the act of willing whatever it is that is willed. In short, there could not be such an interior event like an act of volition since nothing of that sort could have the required logical consequences." (op. cit., pp.52-3)

This criticism would be met if we could provide a means of reference to volitions other than through their effects. Following Alvin Goldman (Goldman, 1970:110), we might try identifying volitions as those occurring at a particular time. Hence we could refer to the agent's volition to move his arm as the volition that occurred at t.

The difficulty with this procedure is that there is no assurance that the volition in question, his volition to

move his arm, occurs at just this time t. There is every uncertainty as to the length or duration of volitions, so it will not be readily possible to identify such an occurrence, with any degree of confidence, as that which occurs, or is occurring, at a particular time.

Furthermore, we may wish to attribute more than one volition to the agent at any one time. In which case we have the same problem of how to distinguish between his volitions. If more than one volition occurs at t, how do we refer to one of these in particular, other than by reference to their effects?

Neither will it do to suggest referring to that volition which is most intense at time t. Unlike desires, which undoubtedly vary in intensity and hence in practical effect, the significance of volitions is in their occurrence not in the strength of their occurrence.

An action has taken place if the appropriate effect is caused by the occurrence of a volition, but there is no reason to suppose that volitions 'vary in intensity', or that if they do, this would differentiate an effective from an ineffective volition. Hence, this suggestion holds no prospect for an alternative means of reference to volitions.

It appears that our only means of describing volitions is by referring to bodily movements, in which case the logical connection between volition and movement presumably excludes the possibility that volitions cause such bodily movements. But let us for the moment ignore the question of

causal relationship and concentrate on the logical connection which binds volition and movement.

Suppose it true that we only refer to volitions via bodily movements, why should this be? This would make sense if we accept, as my account of volition proposes, that volitions are intrinsically tied to movements in the concept of action. In other words, our concept of action is such that it includes not merely a bodily movement or specific sort of response, for frequently these are not actions, but the bringing about of such movements by the agent. In this case the movement is 'included' in the action when a volition is too. On such an account, it is to be expected that we logically tie volition and movement, they are thus linked by the concept of what constitutes an action.

Still, this leaves us with the query about the alleged causal link between volition and bodily movement. Even if the logical connection is comprehensible on the present account of volition, this does not show its compatibility with a causal connection. If we are to accept the force of the logical connection argument there would seem to be only one strategy available to the volition theorist, and that is to explicate the logical link between volition and movement in terms of the supposed causal connection between the two. In other words we can claim that volitions and bodily movements are logically tied <u>because</u> they are causally connected. This possibility is certainly not excluded by the logical connection argument. Yet this alone is no defence.

While it may be possible to construe the logical

connection as stemming from the causal link this does not explain the absence of independent reference to volitions. In supposing the causal link between volition and movement basic to their logical connection, we are thereby committed to volition and movement being independent of one another outside of their causal relationship. So we must accept the possibility of independent reference to each, if we are to make sense of this supposed causal link.

Perhaps then, the volition account can concede that it must be possible to describe volitions independently of the movements which are their effects, yet claim that our present inability to achieve such reference does not invalidate the theory. After all, the fact that we are unable to independently refer to volitions does not disprove the claim that such reference is theoretically feasible. Furthermore, this theoretical feasibility should not be discounted as an extreme defensive position on the part of the volitionist. It is in keeping with the present account of action that volition be hypothesised as a type of event which causes bodily movements, wherein this causing by volition, constitutes the performance of action.

Similarly, in some scientific theory it may be found necessary to hypothesise a more fundamental particle to explain the known phenomena. And just as the characteristics of such a particle may be theoretically formulated to fill the need of the physical theory, so we may articulate the characteristics that volition must have if it is to be a contributive concept in our understanding of action.

To summarise: we have an argument to the effect that if logically linked, volitions and bodily movements cannot be related as cause to effect. The defence is to accept the logical link between volitions and movements whilst claiming that it is to be understood as stemming from, rather than as excluding, the causal connection between the two. In other words, when we refer to a volition as the volition to raise my arm, this description makes sense if we suppose there to be some occurrence, called a volition, which causes that arm movement. Furthermore, this strategy accepts in principle, that such occurrences (volitions) may be identified independently of the movements they produce. Clearly, if volitions are internal happenings of which we are not ordinarily conscious, this would explain the absence of ready independent references to them.

As to the sort of descriptions that might, in principle, be achieved, we may assume that these would come through progress in biological and physiological science, and would be couched in the sort of terms characteristic of reports of causal sequences. Importantly, whilst it accepts the possibility of securing such independent descriptions of volitions, the present account is not itself committed to providing such descriptions.

Evidently, there is scope for an account which presents volitions as both causally and logically linked to bodily movements. It appears that the present logical connection argument can be surmounted.

(2) MELDEN'S SECOND PRONG

Unfortunately, this is not the end of the matter, for Melden's attack has two prongs. He presents a dilemma for the volitionist:

> "Let the act of volition issue in a muscle movement, then... the act must be the willing of that muscle movement, otherwise we should have only inductive grounds for supposing the act to issue in the particular muscle movement. Accordingly, we are faced with the following dilemma: if in thinking of V1 (some particular act of volition) we are of necessity to think of it as the willing of M1 (some particular muscle movement), then V1 cannot be any occurrence mental or physiological, which is causally related to M1, since the very notion of a causal sequence logically implies that cause and effect are intelligible without any logically internal relation of the one to the other. If on the other hand, we think of V1 and M1 as causally related in the way in which we think of the relation between the movement of muscles and the raising of one's arm, then we must conclude that when we first perform V1, we should have no reason to suppose that M1 would in fact ensue. If to avoid this latter consequence we maintain that the thought of the muscle movement enters into the very character of the act of volition... no description of the act of volition can be given that does not involve an account of the muscle movement, and hence we must abandon the idea that the act of volition V1 is a cause that produces M1, the muscle movement." (op. cit., p.51)

Clearly, Melden relies heavily on the 'Humean' side of this dilemma, viz. 'not both causal and logical connection'. But we have seen that this horn does not succeed in impailing the present account of volition. What of Melden's other horn?

Here, Melden argues that volitions cannot be causally

linked to bodily movements, otherwise we would have only inductive evidence for supposing that a specific volition V1 would produce a specific movement M1, and we might well be surprised to find, on performing some volition, which movement was the result. This reductio argument attempts to show that the connection between volition and movement cannot simply be causal. There are two points to be made in response.

Firstly, this objection holds only on the assumption that the link between volition and movement is not both causal and logical, which claim has not been substantiated. Furthermore, in making the assumption that volitions and movements are related as cause to effect, Melden likens this to the link between muscle movement and arm raising. But were we ever surprised on contracting our arm muscles to find that our arm raised?

We did not learn by induction which muscles to contract in order to raise an arm, so the assumption of a causal link between volition and muscle contraction, does not require that we learn by induction to use our volitions in order to move our body. The important point is that we do not learn to raise our arms by first learning which muscles to contract. We learn to raise our arms, and thereby we learn to contract our arm muscles, though we may not even be aware of this aspect of the arm raising. Hence, we may not realise that we are contracting muscles, we may not even realise that the muscles exist. Similarly, with volition and movement, we do not first learn which volition produces

which muscle movement. Just as the muscle contractions come with the arm movement, so the volition comes with muscle contraction. And just as we may not be conscious of contracting our muscles, we may not be conscious of volition. We may not appreciate that it occurs at all. Nevertheless, 'willing' is part and parcel of raising one's arm, just as is the contraction of the arm muscles.

To suppose otherwise, like Melden, is to construe volition as a separate act which one must perform first, before one can raise one's arm. But this is not an accurate representation. When one raises one's arm, muscles contract and volition occurs. These are all aspects of the action, not acts which must be completed separately as means to the action of raising one's arm. I would conclude therefore that Melden's dilemma fails to defeat the present volitional account.

(3) OTTEN ON THE LOGICAL CONNECTION ARGUMENT

Again, the logical connection argument is not readily dismissed; it may be formulated in several different ways, each with different subtleties. In his paper 'Reviving the logical connection argument' (Otten, 1977), James Otten discusses several versions of the logical connection argument (LCA), as they affect the causal theory of action. Specifically, his concern is with the theory that construes wants as causes of action. Nevertheless, we can learn much from a consideration of his paper, both about the LCA and its application to the volition account.

Otten distinguishes two central theses that causal theorists might endorse. What he calls the General Causal Thesis maintains that a human action is caused by certain wants of the agent who performs it, while the Restricted Causal Thesis maintains that a human action is caused by the agent's want to perform that action. It should be evident that only the restricted thesis matches the volition theory, for volitionists maintain that an action is brought about by the specific volition to perform that action. In consequence, while Otten considers it a shortcoming common to formulations of the LCA that they only attempt to refute the restricted causal thesis, for our purposes- to consider their application to the volition account- this is entirely apposite.

One form of LCA appears in Richard Taylor's "Action and Purpose":

> "The fact... that a given event occurs can never entail that another wholly different one will occur, or has occurred, if the relation between them is that of cause to effect. The fact, for example, that a piece of zinc is dropped into a volume of a certain acid cannot entail that it dissolves, nor vice versa, and if there were such entailment, the relation embodied in the hypothetical expressing the fact could not at the same time be regarded as one of causation. Suppose, then, that someone moves his finger... [W]e regard the former [the fact that the person wanted to move his finger] as something entailed by what we now find, namely, just his moving his finger." (Taylor, 1966:51-2)

Otten expresses Taylor's argument as follows:

Argument 1

(1) If W is S's want to perform A, then the fact that A occurs entails that W occurs.

(2) If W causes A then the fact that A occurs does not entail that W occurs. (Otten, 1977:727)

The problem for the causal theorist is that, given the supposed logical connection between want and action, the occurrence of the action entails that the event, which caused the action, also occurred. Yet, the supposition that want and action are causally linked does not entail, from the occurrence of the action, that its cause has occurred. Hence,

> "the causal thesis entail[s] the contradiction that it both is and is not the case that the fact that A occurs entails that W occurs." (loc. cit.)

Before considering the application of this argument to the volition account, I want first to consider what Otten has to say about this particular formulation of the LCA.

In response to Taylor's argument, Otten distinguishes a strong and a weak version of the restricted causal thesis. He argues that Taylor's formulation of the LCA is only effective against the strong version, which version Otten claims is in any case committed to an absurd position. Thereby, Taylor's argument is dismissed as pointless. Since I feel that there is more to this fomulation than meets Otten's eye, I shall review the way in which he dismisses Taylor's case.

Firstly, there is the distinction between strong and weak versions of the restricted causal thesis, explained by Otten as follows:

> "the strong version maintains that a human action, in the full sense of the word 'action', as involving both certain behavior and the want to perform that action, is caused by the agent's want to perform that action. And the weak version maintains that a human action, in a qualified sense of the word 'action, as involving only certain behavior and not the want to perform that action, is caused by the agent's want to perform that action." (op. cit., p.728)

Next, the absurdity of the position of the strong version:

> "the strong version would maintain that Anderson's want to perform [an] action causes both the movement of his arm and his want to perform that action, whereas the weak version would maintain only that Anderson's want to perform that action causes the movement of his arm. So, the strong version is committed to the absurd position that a want to perform an action causes itself." (loc. cit.)

Finally, the contention that Taylor's Argument 1 is effective only against the strong version:

> "given the strong version of the restricted causal thesis, premise (1) of Taylor's argument clearly comes out true, and since premise (2) is obviously true, Taylor's argument successfully refutes the strong version. On the other hand, given the weak version of the restricted causal thesis, premise (1) comes out false, for the fact that certain behavior occurs does not entail that a certain want occurs. The fact that Anderson's arm goes up, for instance, does not entail that Anderson has the want to perform the action of raising his arm; his arm may go up against his will because of a mere muscle spasm. Hence, since premise (1) comes out false, the weak version of the restricted causal thesis is untouched by Taylor's argument." (loc. cit.)

On the strong version outlined by Otten, the action consists of the agent's behaviour plus the want to perform the action, of which his behaviour is the action-result. Hence the peculiar consequence that the want, which allegedly causes the action, must cause itself, for it is included as part of the action.

In contrast, on the weak version, the action is identified with the agent's behaviour, which results from his want to bring about that behaviour. Here, there is no absurdity in supposing the action caused by the want, for the want is not itself part of the action. Otten concludes that Taylor's formulation is ineffectual against the weak version because the fact that certain behaviour occurs would never entail that any want has occurred. Hence, the entailment in Argument 1 does not hold good for the weak version.

While on the face of it, Otten's conclusion seems correct, there are alternatives to his account of the weak version, which he fails to consider. His comment that the weak version escapes Taylor's formulation is only valid so long as A in premise (1) is construed as behaviour rather than action. While the fact that certain behaviour occurs (the fact that Anderson's arm goes up, for instance) does not entail that a certain want occurs (that Anderson has the want to perform the action of raising his arm), the fact that a particular action occurs (that Anderson has raised his arm) may well entail that a particular want has

occurred. Surely it is open to the causal theorist to maintain that action entails want, while denying that behaviour carries such an entailment? Furthermore, to insist that the occurrence of action entails the occurrence of want is not to move from the weak to the strong version of the causal thesis, for this version need not construe the want as included in the action.

In consequence, the causal theorist may be advancing the weak version yet not thereby escape Taylor's argument, for if the theorist maintains that actions are pieces of behaviour caused by wants, it follows logically from the fact that an action has occurred that a want also occurred. In other words, the entailment in premise (1) of Argument 1 would hold good for this version of the causal thesis, which shows that, despite what Otten claims, if Taylor's argument is effective against the strong version, it is equally effective against the weak.

We have seen that Otten contrasts two versions of causal thesis. One identifies the action as including the cause, while the other identifies the action with the effect produced by the right sort of cause. Yet there is a third form which Otten does not recognise. In this third version, the want would be included in the action, but would not be the cause of the action, hence would not cause itself. Rather than cause the action, the want may cause the behaviour which constitutes the action-result. Thereby, the action may be identified as the bringing about, causally, of this action-result by a want. It should be apparent that

this version of the causal thesis in important respects matches the volition account which I have been advocating. The only major difference being that in the above example, the cause is a want, and not a volition. I shall refer to this new form of causal thesis as the Modified Causal Thesis.

(4) BEATING THE LCA

The important question is how this modified version of the causal thesis would fare against Taylor's formulation of the LCA. Apparently, this approach would fall to Taylor's Argument 1 as surely as the earlier versions of the causal thesis, for it seems to render true both premise (1) and premise (2), thereby entailing the contradiction noted by Otten. But to suppose this would be a mistake, for given that the want does not cause the action, premise (2) is not true. If W does not cause A, the antecedent of (2) is false, hence premise (2) is false.

Yet the situation is not clear-cut. In response, Taylor might urge that to construe wants as cause of action-results rather than actions is merely a way of concealing the implicit causal link between wants and actions.

The modified causal thesis advocates that action-results, not actions, are the effects of wants, hence the link between want and action-result is straightforwardly causal. But the link between action-result and action is logical, for the action-result is that event whose occurrence is logically necessary for the occurrence of the

action, it follows that the want is causally necessary for the occurrence of the action. So there is a clear sense in which the want and action are causally linked. But is this link such as to render Taylor's Argument 1 valid? In particular, does this fact make premise (2) true?

Premise (2) may be revised as follows:

(2a) If W is causally related to A, then the fact that A occurs does not entail that W occurs.

Now that the antecedent of (2a) is true, it would appear that this causal thesis cannot avoid contradiction on Taylor's formulation of the LCA. But here we must remind ourselves that 'action' on this account consists of want and action-result. Furthermore, so long as this fact is not represented in (2a) then Taylor's argument begs the question against the causal theorist.

This can be appreciated if we replace A in (2a) by action-result plus want (R+W), thus:

(2b) If W is causally related to R+W then the fact that R+W occurs does not entail that W occurs.

So long as A is understood in this way it is clear that the occurrence of A, viz. of action-result plus want, does indeed entail the occurrence of want W. If Taylor were to reject this instantiation of A he would in effect be begging the question against the causal theorist, for this would be

a prior rejection of this account of action as action-result plus want.

It follows from these considerations that the present causal account of action (whereby action consists of an action-result produced by the agent's want to perform that action) does not succumb to Taylor's argument. For, despite the amendment of (2) to (2a), which renders the antecedent true, amendment (2b) shows that the consequent would be false. The occurrence of A would indeed entail the occurrence of W.

The only worry that remains with the modified causal thesis is that it now suffers the same defect as the strong version earlier considered and rejected by Otten. This was the version that construed the want W as part of the action A, of which Otten remarked:

> "the strong version would maintain that Anderson's want to perform that action causes both the movement of his arm and his want to perform that action... So, the strong version is committed to the absurd position that a want to perform an action causes itself." (op. cit., p.728)

Is not this the position of the present modified causal account? Here it is said that the want W is causally related to action A, while action A is presented as the causing of an action-result plus this very want W. Which is to say that want W is causally related to itself. Is this not Otten's 'absurd position'?

In defence, I would argue that while it is absurd to allege that want W causes itself, it is not absurd to claim

that W is 'causally related' to itself as part of action A. The sense of 'causally related' has yet to be fully explicated.

To understand the coherence of the present position we must recall that action A is not an effect produced by want W. Rather, A is the causing that consists in the bringing about of the action-result R, by want W. Hence, W is straightforwardly causally related to R, but not so to A, for W causes R, it does not cause A. W is causally related to A through the fact that the effect of W, i.e. R, is logically tied to A. And since W is causally necessary for R, it follows that W is causally necessary for the occurrence of A.

But there is nothing absurd in this position, for although W is causally necessary for A, and A consists in W's causing R, it does not follow that W is causally necessary for itself. From the fact that the occurrence of W is causally required for it to be the case that W causes R, it does not follow that the occurrence of W is required for the occurrence of W. It is not legitimate to separate the cause (W) and the effect (R) in the causing (A), and thereby claim that because W is causally necessary for W and R jointly as a causing, that W is causally necessary for W and R separately.

The same would be true of another example: striking a match is causally necessary for the match lighting, but the match lighting is not itself my action of lighting the match. This action must also embody the striking of the

match. Hence, my action of lighting the match is a causing; it is my bringing it about that the match ignites by striking it.

Here, my striking the match is causally required for its ignition, and the match igniting is logically required for my action of lighting the match. So we can say that striking the match is causally required for my action of bringing it about that the match ignites. But then, one might suppose, since this action incorporates the striking, that striking the match is causally required for striking the match. This conclusion would be absurd.

One cannot validly move from the fact that S (striking the match) is causally required for A (my bringing it about, by striking the match, that it ignites), to the conclusion that S is causally required for S, on the grounds that A incorporates S. This would be the fallacy of supposing the father of a family causally necessary for his own existence since he is both a member of that family unit, and causally necessary (as father of the children), for the family's existence.

We can see therefore that the present modified causal account does not suffer from the absurd aspect that Otten earlier attributed to the strong version. For there is no incoherence in the implied causal link between the want W, and the action A. This being so, we can conclude that this form of causal thesis does not succumb to Taylor's formulation of the LCA. What remains to be considered is whether Otten's own formulation of the LCA, which he regards

as 'a conclusive refutation of the restricted causal thesis' (op. cit., p.737), is effective against the modified causal account.

Otten's formulation of the LCA is derived from Raziel Abelson, whose version of the argument he draws from the following extract:

> "Assume that Jones wants, intends, desires, or in some sense has a motive to open the window. What does this entail about what he will do? Well it entails that he will open the window, but it does not entail this tout court. It entails that he will open the window, provided that no reason arises for his not doing so... and provided nothing prevents him... The provisos here constitute the contextual limitation... on the entailment between motive and act... In this contextually limited way, a motive is indeed logically connected to an action, and not just through the way it happens to be described, and not just to the concept of action, but to its actual performance." (Abelson, 1969:183-4)

Abelson's version of the LCA is expressed as follows:

Argument 2

(3) If W is S's want to perform A, then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O entails that A occurs.

(4) If W causes A, then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O does not entail that A occurs.

As Otten explains,

> "these two premises when taken in conjunction with the restricted causal thesis entail the contradiction that it both is and is not the case that the fact that W occurs under optimal

> conditions O entails that A occurs, but when they are taken apart from this thesis they entail no contradiction. Therefore the causal thesis is contradictory." (op. cit., p.731)

Although he feels that support and defence is required for premise (3) in the above argument, with this provision, Otten regards Argument 2 as effectively destructive of the causal thesis. For my purposes, it is not necessary to go into the details of Otten's misgivings with premise (3). I shall, for the sake of argument, grant the truth of this premise. Does this mean that the modified causal thesis falls to Argument 2? It should be evident that I think it does not.

This causal thesis, whereby a want causes an action-result, which causing constitutes action, is not straightforwardly a 'causal' thesis on the lines considered by Otten. The versions he considers construe wants as efficient causes of action, which this modified thesis does not. From this difference, we can show that Argument 2 fails to defeat the modified causal thesis.

According to the modified thesis, the want W does not cause the action A. This means that the antecedent of premise (4) is false, and although this ensures the truth of premise (4) as a conditional statement, it does not ensure the truth of the consequent of this premise. Thus, since its antecedent is false, premise (4) will be technically true no matter what its consequent may be. Hence the truth of the consequent is not established, and the combination of premise (4) with premise (3) produces no contradiction for

the modified causal theorist. He can accept the truth of both of these premises without accepting the truth of both of their consequents. Thereby, the modified causal thesis avoids any contradiction, and is unscathed by Argument 2.

Given the theoretical differences between the standard causal account considered by Otten and the modified account which I have detailed, we should perhaps ask whether Argument 2 can be altered in any way so as to apply directly to the modified thesis.

At present, the difficulty with Argument 2 is that premise (4) is ineffectual since on the modified causal account the want causes the action-result and not the action A. This may suggest an amendment to premise (4), as follows:

> (4a) If W causes R then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O does not entail that R occurs.

With this modification, premise (4a) should be true, but the combination of (3) and (4a) does not look helpful as an argument against the amended causal thesis. While (4a) expresses the entailment that R does not occur, premise (3) expresses the entailment that A occurs. There is no apparent contradiction from the combination of (3) and (4a).

The remaining alternative is to amend premise (3) after the fashion of (4a), thereby producing:

> (3a) If W is S's want to perform R, then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O entails that R

occurs.

But while the resultant entailment of (3a) does conflict with that of (4a), premise (3a) is unacceptable to the causal theorist, since its antecedent, 'W is S's want to perform R', is false. R is an action-result, and as such, though it is caused by W, it is not what S wants to perform. S can only perform the action A, not the result R. Hence, W is not S's want to perform R, and (3a) is false.

Although it appears that such amendments cannot rescue Otten's argument, we might take a second look at the argument consisting of premises (3) and (4a), viz.:

Argument 3

(3) If W is S's want to perform A, then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O entails that A occurs.

(4a) If W causes R then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O does not entail that R occurs.

We have said that, although both of these premises are acceptable, this combination seems to produce no contradiction. But to suppose this would be an error, for in fact (3) and (4a) do conflict.

The appearance of no conflict comes from the fact that while (3) states an entailment about the occurrence of A, (4a) states an entailment about the non-occurrence of R. But if we recall that R is the action-result of the action A,

and that the occurrence of an action logically requires the occurrence of its action-result, it follows that the entailment in (3), that A occurs, also entails that R occurs.

With the additional premise that the occurrence of A entails the occurrence of R, to which the causal theorist is committed, it becomes evident that (3) and (4a) present contradictory conclusions. When combined they entail the contradiction that it both is and is not the case that the fact that W occurs entails that R occurs. In the combination of (3) and (4a), expressed as Argument 3, we may have the conclusive argument that Otten sought against the causal thesis.

Still, I am unhappy with the resultant Argument 3. If valid, it obviously deals effectively with the causal thesis, but is it valid? If we can show that one of the premises in this argument is false, this would render Argument 3 ineffective against the modified causal thesis. With good reason, I shall argue that premise (4a) is false.

In order to appreciate the falsity of (4a) we first have to turn our attention to premise (3), which states that under optimal conditions O, the occurrence of W entails the occurrence of A. But what exactly is included under optimal conditions O? Otten offers the following explanation:

> "The optimal conditions O which are mentioned in Argument [3] are just those conditions which place the contextual limitation on the entailment between having the want and performing the action. Presumably S's want W to perform A occurs under

> optimal conditions O just in case S has the opportunity to exercise his ability to perform A, nothing interferes with S's opportunity, S has no overriding wants, S has the appropriate beliefs and knowledge, and S's endeavor to perform A would end in his doing so." (op. cit., p.731)

So, the optimal conditions O are the contextual limitation on the entailment between having the want and performing the action, but would this entailment still take effect if we added the following proviso?:

> (P) There are empirical conditions which prevent R from following upon W.

Clearly, if (P) applies then the entailment in (3) would not work. If W is S's want to perform A and W occurs when there are empirical conditions which prevent R from following upon W, this means that A will not occur, for the occurrence of A logically requires the occurrence of R.

What this shows is that the entailment in (3) requires that the optimal conditions O include the negation of (P). In other words, it must be the case that there are no empirical conditions which prevent R from following upon W (i.e. not-P), otherwise, the occurrence of W will not entail the occurrence of A.

We may conclude therefore that optimal conditions O, include the negation of (P). This restores the validity of premise (3), and we can turn our attention to premise (4a).

This premise states that, if W causes R, then if W occurs, even under optimal conditions O, this does not

entail that R occurs. But we have shown that O must include not-P, and this must lead us to reconsider the truth of premise (4a).

Making explicit the negation of (P) included in the optimal conditions O, premise (4a) may be restated as follows:

> (4a) If W causes R then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O, with no empirical conditions which prevent R from following upon W, does not entail that R occurs.

What are we to say of this expansion of (4a)? Is it true or false? Consider the following statement:

> (5) If W causes R then the fact that W occurs, when there are no empirical conditions which prevent R from following upon W, entails that R occurs.

Surely, if 'W causes R' means anything it means that in the absence of empirical conditions which would prevent R from following upon W, if W occurs, then R must also occur. In which case, statement (5) is true, and this, in turn, indicates the falsity of (4a). For given that W causes R, and that W occurs when there are no empirical conditions which prevent R from following upon W, it follows, from the logic of causality, that R occurs.

A possible objection is that there may be non-empirical

reasons why, given that W causes R and that W occurs, R does not follow upon W. In which case, the inclusion of not-P in the optimal conditions may not be sufficient to render the entailment in (4a) false. If this were so, the optimal conditions may also not be sufficient to ensure the truth of (3). Obviously, the appropriate strategy is to include within the optimal conditions, not merely that there are no empirical restrictions to R following upon W, but also that there are no non-empirical restrictions which prevent this. Thereby, we would restore the truth of (3), and yet be in a position to insist upon the falsity of (4a). For this additional change to the optimal conditions would ensure that if W causes R, then the fact that W occurs under optimal conditions O entails that R occurs.

So we have seen that premise (4a) is false. My argument proves that under optimal conditions O, if W causes R, then the occurrence of R is entailed. In turn, the falsity of (4a) indicates the invalidity of Otten's Argument 3, which ultimately fails against the causal thesis.

This leaves us in a position to assert the coherence of our modified causal account, contrary to the views of those who endorse the LCA. Furthermore, while the above arguments have been applied in defence of a modified causal account in terms of wants, the matching volition account, in terms of volitions causing action-results, is, by the same defence, proved secure from the logical connection argument.

In conclusion, it may be noted that since the causal account in terms of wants, and the volition account both

meet the rigours of the logical connection argument, this leaves open the issue of which thesis is the more acceptable, for it is clear that the two are incompatible. So far as the LCA goes, there is nothing to choose between these two accounts of action, but we have already learned from our discussion of wayward causation (Chapter 2), that the causal approach is flawed in a way that the volition account is not. (I shall have more to say on this latter contention in Chapter 10.)

CHAPTER 1Ø : ASSESSING VOLITIONS

(1) CHARACTERISING VOLITION

A considerable hurdle faced by any volition theory of action is to meet the criticism, as old as the theory itself, that no one is familiar with these allegedly omnipresent elements in action, which are called volitions. This complaint has been the impetus behind many rejections of volition. Thus, Melden, for example, insists that

> "The attempt to distinguish bodily movements that do from those that do not count as actions in terms of occurrent psychological processes is doomed to failure. What passes through my mind as I now act may be anything or nothing; it may be that all that happens is that without anything relevant passing through my mind, I just act." (Melden, 1956:64; reference to Gustafson, 197Ø)

In similar vein, Richard Taylor denies that

> "anyone has ever found volitions occurring within himself, or within his mind, by any introspective scrutiny of his mental life." (Taylor, 1966:??)

We have seen that Ryle is another who makes great play on the claim that no one is familiar with volition (cf. Chapter 9). Certainly, the evidence endorses such criticisms of volition. Earlier volition theories were marred by claims as to the indefinable, or ultimately unknowable nature of such alleged occurrences. Such has never been an enticing doctrine. Additionally, attempts, such as that of William James, to detail the processes of the will seemed destined

to fail, in virtue of the emphasis placed upon introspection (cf. Chapter 3).

In the face of such bad press, we should not expect to find modern theorists advocating introspectible volitions. Yet this does occur. Michael Gorr urges that

> "a person who is... deliberating about a difficult and painful decision is often very aware of what is going through his mind; when he does act, therefore, it is likely that he has excellent introspectible evidence of the volition that so prompted him." (Gorr, 1979a:239)

On this basis, he suggests that

> "our everyday concept of an action is rooted in our awareness of behaviour as flowing (causally) from volition; the degree to which we are conscious of such volitions, however, varies greatly..." (loc. cit.)

How can we understand such a view?

The answer may lie in the first of these quotations from Gorr. He supposes that an agent may have introspectible evidence for his volitions, on the grounds that he is 'aware of what is going through his mind' when he comes to act. There is no denying that we are often acutely aware of our conscious thought processes when we deliberate over a difficult decision. And, presumably, if there is any possible introspectible evidence of volition we could be most aware of it under these circumstances. But it is far from obvious that there is anything present to consciousness that may be unequivocally identified as volition.

Of course this is not to say that the agent may not be aware when he comes to act precisely why he is doing what he does. We do generally appreciate what we are doing and why we are doing it. But such awareness is not consciousness of volition. More plausibly, it is consciousness of our activity; that we are engaged in action. While Gorr is right in seeking to relate such consciousness to volition he is rash in equating it with consciousness of volition itself. An alternative account has already been given of how best to understand such awareness in agency (cf. Chapter 5).

There may always be a tendency to misconstrue our awareness of our own activity as awareness of a special conscious element that characterises actions as such. We saw earlier that representing volition as a species of thought is Hugh McCann's way of construing volition as a conscious introspectible element in action (Chapter 6, Section (3)ff.) In contrast, such complications may be avoided if we suppose that volition is not itself a conscious element in action, but serves to explain the agent's sense of his own activity.

While a major criticism of volition is circumvented on the assumption that such occurrences are not introspectible, a query naturally arises as to the status of volition itself. If we are not conscious of such features of action, why suppose that they occur at all?

The answer is simple. We need to suppose that volitions occur if we are to make sense of our belief in agency and the distinction commonly drawn between actions and mere events. It emerges that we have reason to posit volition as

an essential characteristic of action. Still, we may face the criticism that little or nothing has yet been said as to the nature of volitions. It is all very well noting that volitions are not introspectible, not actions, not causes of actions, not intentional, etc. Aside from what they are not, what qualities do volitions actually possess?

As previously suggested (Chapter 5), we must suppose that volitions have just those features that we find necessary to attribute to them, according to the phenomena to be explained, and the needs of the analysis of action. Thus, it is appropriate to treat volition as a constituent of action, rather than its cause, as a causing (sequence of causally related events) rather than an event, and as a non-intentional doing which is not itself actional. This procedure for detailing the relation of volition to action is what Lawrence Davis calls 'a functional characterisation' (Davis, 1979:18ff.), for we have characterised volition in terms of what it does; the part we must suppose it to play in action.

(2) OBJECTIONS

In this section I want to attend to what appear to me to be the most likely objections to the volitional account of action that I have detailed in the present work. The first of these criticisms centres on what may be considered the counter-intuitive elements in my portrayal of volition.

Three aspects come immediately to mind. I have described volition as non-actional; have said it is

non-intentional; and should perhaps not be regarded as voluntary. Taken singly, or all together, these features may run counter to our intuition that willing is an activity in which we engage, and should thereby be voluntary, intentional, and actional. After all, if volition is neither voluntary nor intentional, it must be something that one suffers rather than something one does.

In my defence, I would point out that on the account I have detailed, willing qualifies as something one does. But this is not to imply that it is either an action or intentional. Willing counts as a doing because it is a causal means employed by agents in performing actions. Because it is not a teleological means to action, volition does not qualify as intentional. It is not a means that figures in the agent's conscious purposes (cf. Chapter 6, Section (5)).

As to the complaint that willing must be something one suffers, this is partly rebuffed by the detail of volition as a doing. A remaining worry is that, if not intentional, volition may occur to the surprise of the agent himself. After all, if it does not form part of his conscious purposes, he may not know of its likely occurrence until he finds himself active.

This certainly would be odd. Again, this raises the issue of how volitions come about (see also Chapter 5, Section (3)). A clearer view of the situation may be achieved once it is realised that while willing is not part of the agent's conscious purposes, this does not imply that

it must take him by surprise, when he is involved in action. For his volitions will arise from the agent's intentions and aims, combined with his beliefs about appropriate courses of action.

Unlike actions, volitions cannot form part of the agent's conscious aims and purposes, but like actions, volitions can accord with the agent's intentions, desires, and aims. This being the case, the agent will not ordinarily find his behaviour at odds with what he consciously wishes to do or to achieve. (There is a possible exception to this which I will detail in Section (3) of the present chapter.)

We see therefore, that although it is not intentional, volition does not simply happen to the agent. Indeed, the air of peculiarity in denying that willing is intentional, may be relieved if we note that it may be intentional in the sense of according with the agent's intentions, since it will ordinarily be part of the process of fulfilling these intentions. But it remains unintentional if that means being performed consciously as a means to an end

The suggestion that willing is not voluntary may carry a similar sense of oddity, but as is made clear in Chapter 8 (Section (3)), it is a mistake to suppose that the voluntariness of actions must stem from the voluntariness of volitions. Actions will be voluntary by virtue of their relation to volition, not because voluntariness is a transitive quality, passed on from volition to action.

As to the non-actional status of volition, this should

be no more counter-intuitive than the details just considered. That volition is part of action and not something separate is reflected in the fact that the occurrence of volition does not serve to adequately explain the occurrence of an action. Thus, if we ask 'why did you shoot the milkman?' it would not be considered appropriate to reply 'because I willed to shoot him'. If the volition were indeed an entity separate from the action, yet responsible for the action's occurrence, we should expect that reference to the volition would be adequate to explain the action in question.

Significantly, an acceptable answer to the question 'why did you shoot the milkman?' would also adequately answer 'why did you will to shoot the milkman?'. This is in keeping with volition being a part of the action, whereby one cannot explain one's action without thereby explaining one's willing to do that action. Both the volition and the corresponding action are properly explained in terms of the agent's wants, beliefs, reasons and intentions. If it is appreciated that volitions, like complete actions, accord with the agent's desires and intentions, and also qualify as something he does, there should be no worries over denying that volition is itself action. Nothing is lost through this denial that we should ordinarily wish to retain.

To sum up: there is no absurdity in deeming volitions non-intentional, non-voluntary, and non-actional. Any inclination to view these features as implausible should be dispelled once their full significance is appreciated.

I turn now to an implication of my account of volition that would appear to be problematic. Actions have been characterised as causings, comprising the bringing about of some effect by a volition. Thus, my raising my arm is a causing comprising of my bringing it about that my arm rises by my volition to raise my arm.

In addition, I have noted as a characteristic of volition that it accounts for the agent's awareness of acting whenever he performs any doing. From these two aspects, a possibly awkward consequence emerges. The agent's belief that he is active derives from his volition, we can reasonably suppose that his belief would be caused by his volition. But this means that the agent's belief that he is active is itself an action, for this belief bears the requisite relation to volition. It is surely counter-intuitive to suppose that an agent's belief that he is doing something should itself be one of his actions.

As a step toward meeting this problem, we must be clear on what it is that under such circumstances, apparently qualifies as action. If I will, and consequently believe that I have acted, then I have acted in bringing about this belief. The action is not my believing that I have done such-and-such, but my bringing it about that I believe that I have done such-and-such. This should remove some of the counter-intuitive air from the situation, for it is not in fact alleged that the agent's belief constitutes action. Such a view would be peculiar, since beliefs are essentially different in nature from action; being things that we have

rather than things that we do.

But is it acceptable that the agent's bringing it about that he believes himself to be active should count as action? It may help to ask why bringing about such a thing should not so qualify.

Certainly, I might be held responsible for leading a neighbour to believe that I would care for his house during his foreign holiday. Indeed, bringing it about that he believes such a thing, perhaps directly, by telling him that I would care for the house, would be an action on my part. So, why may it not be my action to bring it about that I believe myself active? The obvious reply is that I am unaware that I have done such a thing.

While it may be true that my belief is caused by my willing to do such-and-such, it is also true that I am ordinarily oblivious of this connection. It seems strange therefore that bringing it about that I believe something could be my action, on a par with opening a window, or abusing one's mother-in-law.

Fortunately, this oddity is removed when we see that like many other actions, bringing about such a belief is ordinarily unintentional. Indeed, it is unintentional in both of the senses noted earlier. My bringing about such beliefs does not figure in my conscious purposes, nor does it accord with my aims and intentions. In this way, evoking such a belief in oneself is on a par with accidental actions, such as unintentionally giving my neighbour the impression that I would act as caretaker for his home, or

creating a static electric charge when I comb my hair.

So, while it is a consequence of my account that agent's coming to believe themselves active would count as action, this is not a problem, for as such, these will be unintentional deeds that every agent ordinarily performs in virtue of his willing.

The final difficulty that I envisage for my account of the volition theory assails the view that volitions can have objects, if volitions are not elements of consciousness.

Traditionally, volitions <u>do</u> have objects. Thus, according to Reid,

> "Every act of will must have some object. He that wills must will something, and that which he wills is called the object of his volition. As a man cannot think without thinking of something, nor remember without remembering something, so neither can he will without willing something. Every act of will, therefore, must have an object; and the person who wills must have some conception, more or less distinct, of what he wills." (Essays, p.59)

The objection I anticipate is that if we are not aware of volitions they cannot be the sort of occurrence to have objects. This may be supported by Reid's examples of mental phenomena other than volitions, that have objects.

Certainly, thinking and remembering have objects, but we are always aware of both thinking and remembering whenever such phenomena occur. So, if volitions have objects, why are we not aware of willing?

This line of argument is misleading. It is true that

mental occurrences such as thinking, remembering, wondering, wishing, and the like, have objects. Also, we are generally aware when thinking, remembering, or wondering that we are doing so. But precisely what is it that we are conscious of in such instances?

If the argument against volitions having objects is to carry weight we should expect to be aware of our thinking, remembering, wondering, etc. Yet there is a tendency here to confuse the mental activity with its object. Thus, when I remember my ration card number I am certainly conscious of the object of my remembering, for this is just the number that comes to mind. But apart from my consciousness of this number coming to mind when I want it to, is there any awareness of the process whereby this end is achieved? Surely, what we are conscious of is not the mental process of remembering, or thinking, or wondering, but only of what we remember, what we think, and what we wonder. By the same token, upon willing, one should expect to be conscious not of this process itself, but of what one wills. And what one wills is not a volition, but the object of one's volition.

Hence, it is natural that we should not be conscious of our volitions, just as we are unconscious of the processes whereby we come to have thoughts, or remember ration card numbers. It is a mistake to suppose it a requirement of any mental occurrence with an object that one be conscious of such an occurrence. Ordinarily, we are aware of the objects that we will, but not of such a process as willing.

The lesson we can learn from this discussion is summed

up well by Daniel Dennett:

> "Lashley long ago pointed out that if asked to think a thought in dactylic hexameter we (many of us) can oblige, but we have no awareness of how we do it: the result arrives, and that is the extent of our direct access to the whole business. Lashley's provocative comment on his example was that 'no activity of the mind is ever conscious', and the interpretation of this that I am supporting is that we have access- conscious access- to the results of mental processes, but not to the processes themselves." (Dennett, 1978:165)

On this issue, I accord with Dennett. As with other mental processes, willing is not a subject of consciousness, though what we will (what we intend to bring about) generally is. Consequently, we can appreciate that far from being problematic, the fact that we are not conscious of our volitions is in keeping with such occurrences having objects.

This is also in line with Reid's comment that 'every act of will... must have an object; and the person who wills must have some conception more or less distinct, of what he wills'. (loc. cit.). It is generally true that agent's have some conception of what they will. This is reflected in the fact that their volitions will accord with what they intend or desire to bring about. Hence, the usage of 'what a person wills' as 'what they desire or would choose to be the case".

In conclusion, I submit that such criticisms as I have detailed, are readily seen to be either misleading or misdirected, and thus pose no serious threat to my account of action. Yet, we cannot be content with the present

volition theory until it has been shown preferable to the causal theory in respect of the problem of wayward causation. In what follows, I shall attempt to prove this final point.

(3) VOLITION AND WAYWARD CAUSALITY

The question that remains is whether my account of action in terms of volition can avoid the failing of the causal theory when faced with anomalous causal chains (cf. Chapter 2). The examples of wayward causality considered earlier, indicate the inadequacy of describing actions as events caused, for example, by the agent's reasons. In contrast, is it adequate to describe actions as causings consisting in action-results caused by volitions?

To begin, we might reconsider Davidson's climber example. In this instance, the climber's reason for releasing the rope may cause him to do so, without his resulting behaviour qualifying as action. What if his behaviour were produced by volition?

Certainly, we could imagine a volition having results that the agent neither chose nor intended, so we may have a parallel to the problem of wayward causality in the case of volitions. Consider a revision of Davidson's example.

A climber, while holding another man on a rope, may wish to blow his nose. This he does whilst retaining hold on the rope with one hand. But the result of removing a hand from the rope is that he is unable to maintain his hold, and

so the other man is dropped.

We can suppose that the climber's action of blowing his nose was the direct result of a volition to blow his nose, while his releasing the rope, although also resulting from this volition, was not part of its object. To parallel the problem for the causal account, we should expect that the climber's releasing the rope, although it has the right sort of cause, does not count as action, because it was not caused in the right sort of way. If this were so, then the problems of wayward causality would snooker the volitionist account as surely as the causal one. But this does not happen, for although the climber did not choose, intend, nor wish to release the rope, it will still count as his action under these circumstances. In this case, it is an unintentional action, which occurred as a result of his intentional action of blowing his nose, which in turn, qualified as actional by virtue of its relation to his volition to blow his nose. So, it appears that an event's being causally related to a volition is sufficient to qualify it as actional. But is it?

This parallel to Davidson's example of wayward causality is not precise, for in the former instance no action was performed by the climber, while in the present case, he does perform an action in blowing his nose. Could there not be a causal consequence of a volition with no other action performed? After all, this may make all the difference to whether releasing the rope counts as action or not.

The exact parallel we require is something like this: the climber has a volition to blow his nose, but he does not do so (knowing that it might affect his grip on the rope), yet the occurrence of this volition, and the thought of the possible consequences of acting upon it, so unnerve him that he releases the rope.

In this case, his releasing the rope would not count as action, even though caused by a volition. But, though this example more closely parallels the problem case for the causal theory, such an occurrence could never happen. This example misrepresents the nature of volition. In effect, it treats having a volition as on a par with having a reason, belief, or desire. But one is not aware of 'having volitions', nor do we decide whether or not to act upon them; otherwise we would have to will to will, and so on. So, the above example could not occur, and does not represent a problem for the volitionist account.

Of course there are always Variants upon such putative problem cases. One such version is forwarded by Myles Brand, who believes that the volition theory succumbs to wayward causation. His example is this: suppose I will to raise my arm, but my arm is suddenly paralysed. I become alarmed at this, and a nervous reaction develops causing my eye to twitch. Here there is a bit of behaviour, my eye twitching, that is a causal consequence of the right sort of cause, viz. volition (Brand, 1979:135-6). The question is whether this eye twitching would qualify as action.

One's immediate reaction may be to deny that it could be so, although it must be deemed so by the volitionist. It seems absurd that a nervous response should qualify as action. Yet, this is not precisely the implication of Brand's example.

There is no denying that the volitional account is compelled to describe something in this behaviour as actional, but what? Bearing in mind that actions are causings comprising the bringing about of some effect by volition, we can appreciate that what this agent has done, albeit inadvertently, is to bring it about that his eye twitches nervously. Obviously, under the circumstances, this is not an intentional action, but as a bringing about, it is an action nonetheless.

In like fashion, I may be held responsible for bringing it about that my neighbour develop hay fever, through my exposing him to vast quantities of pollen. Although developing such an allergy is never itself an action, bringing it about that someone develop such a condition may well be. Thus, while developing a nervous twitch is never of its own right an action, bringing it about that someone, even myself, develop such a twitch can readily be so.

In consequence, Brand's example does no violence to the volitionist's claim that actions are a combination of events caused by volitions, and the volitions that cause these events.

Lawrence Davis offers the following counter-example for

the volitionist:

> "Noticing the occurrence of a volition [in Sam], the mind reader, obligingly moves Sam's arm for him. Had Sam not willed to move his arm, the mind reader would not have done anything, so the mind reader's action, hence the motion of Sam's arm, occurred as a result of Sam's volition. It follows that Sam has moved his arm, and that his doing so was an action." (Davis, 1979:22)

Why should his suggestion worry us? We may hesitate to accept that Sam has performed an action of moving his arm, because of the role played by the mind reader. Yet there is no denying the causal link between Sam's volition and his arm going up. Is this a serious difficulty for the volition account?

In fact, we met a similar example in our earlier discussion of wayward causality (Chapter 2, Section (2)). As before, the resolution of this problem is to note that agency is not transitive through persons. Thus, it would be apt to say that the mind reader raised Sam's arm, rather than, Sam raised it. Additionally, of course, we can attribute Sam with the action of getting the mind reader to raise his arm. This is certainly Sam's action and not the mind reader's. So, this version is easily assimilated by the volition account.

One further Variant remains from our earlier discussion of wayward causation. This is the instance where Jones is connected to an electronic black box which responds to his volition by causing the appropriate movement in Jones's body. But this is no problem for the volitionist. If we

suppose that Jones's arm raising is the result of his volition via this black box, then, even if he is ignorant of the part played by this device, his arm raising still qualifies as a component of his action of arm raising. It is proper in such circumstances to describe Jones as having raised his arm.

So far it would appear that the volition account can readily accommodate such examples as have defeated its rival, in the causal theory. There now remains one variation on the theme of wayward causation to be considered.

This final variety stems from the possibility that someone might intercede between an agent's reasons, beliefs, purposes,intentions, and his volition, so as to initiate the volition other than by its usual path from these reasons, intentions, and the like. The question is what we should say about such a bringing about of action-results. Is it action, or not?

This looks awkward for the volitionist, since he is compelled to accept such instances as causings with the right sort of cause in volition, and a corresponding effect, in bodily movement. Yet, considering the element of outside interference in this example do we really want to class this as a genuine case of action on the part of the manipulated individual? (Possibly, such a case describes the situation in hypnosis, with the subject's volition being cued by the hypnotist, independently of any reasons, or intention on the subject's part.)

We may be tempted to describe the resultant behaviour as action not on the part of the person whose body moves, but on the part of him who initiates the volition that produces such movements. This would certainly be in opposition to the volition account. But there may be a more plausible story, in keeping with the demands of the volition theory.

We may deem the behaviour of the subject as actional; we would, after all, say that someone had got him to act as he did. The fact that his behaviour does not accord with his intentions, desires and beliefs, ensures that he does not act intentionally, and we may even expect him to be surprised at what he does. This can be expected, because what he does is done for no reason of his own. We might imagine the subject wondering why he did what he did, though he will not wonder whether he did it. Since he willed his behaviour, he would be aware of what he was doing. He simply may not understand why he is doing it. In this fashion, he is still the agent, although he would not be held responsible for his actions. Whoever has initiated the agent's volition will be responsible for the outcome.

In conclusion, I submit that the volition account adequately meets the rigours of wayward causality, and this fact, when considered in conjunction with its other strengths, indicates that it may plausibly be regarded as an appropriate account of action.

(4) CLOSING REMARKS

We are now in a position to note the significant changes in the proposed account of action from the classical approach detailed in Chapter 3. On the present volitional theory the following aspects are evident:

(1) Volition is not a mental 'act', and is not action in its own right. Instead, it is a cause of action-results, and thereby a component of action.

(2) The relation of volitions to their effects is still causal, but the effects of volition are not actions but action-results.

(3) Volition is not something that we are conscious of doing, although we are aware when we will, of our 'being active'.

(4) Volition can to some degree be characterised functionally, since it is posited to explain the nature of action.

(5) Volitions have objects; these are not the actions that we will, but the results whose occurrence are necessary for our actions.

(6) It is the relation of volition to action (and specifically to action-results) that serves to distinguish the voluntary from other deeds and sufferings.

We should note that of these tenets, only the sixth remains essentially unchanged from the views of the earlier volitionists. This should be expected since without this final thesis no theory could rightly claim to be a volitional account of action.

That so many features of the earlier volitionism should require modification is salutary. Having considered their shortcomings, we may appreciate the recent disregard for the volitional approach to action. At the same time, we are in a position to realise the true potential of just such a theory to resolve the problem of action. The account of action developed here can hope to serve this purpose, for therein we can seek justification for our familiar concept of action, and a ground for our distinction between actions and mere occurrences. There is every reason to suppose that this ground may lie in volition, as the essential component of action. This will be the <u>real</u> difference between actions and other events.

In concluding, it is worth noting that my account of actions as causings, comprising of action-results caused by volitions, is an echo of a view expressed by John Stuart Mill. Of our early group of volitionists, Mill was singular in regarding action as

> "not one thing but a series of two things; ...a volition, followed by an effect. ...the two together constitute action." (Logic, p.35)

In this insight, a solution to the problem of action has long lain dormant.

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